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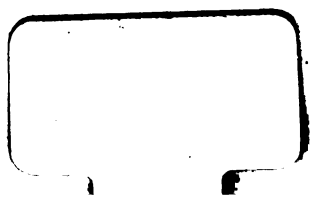
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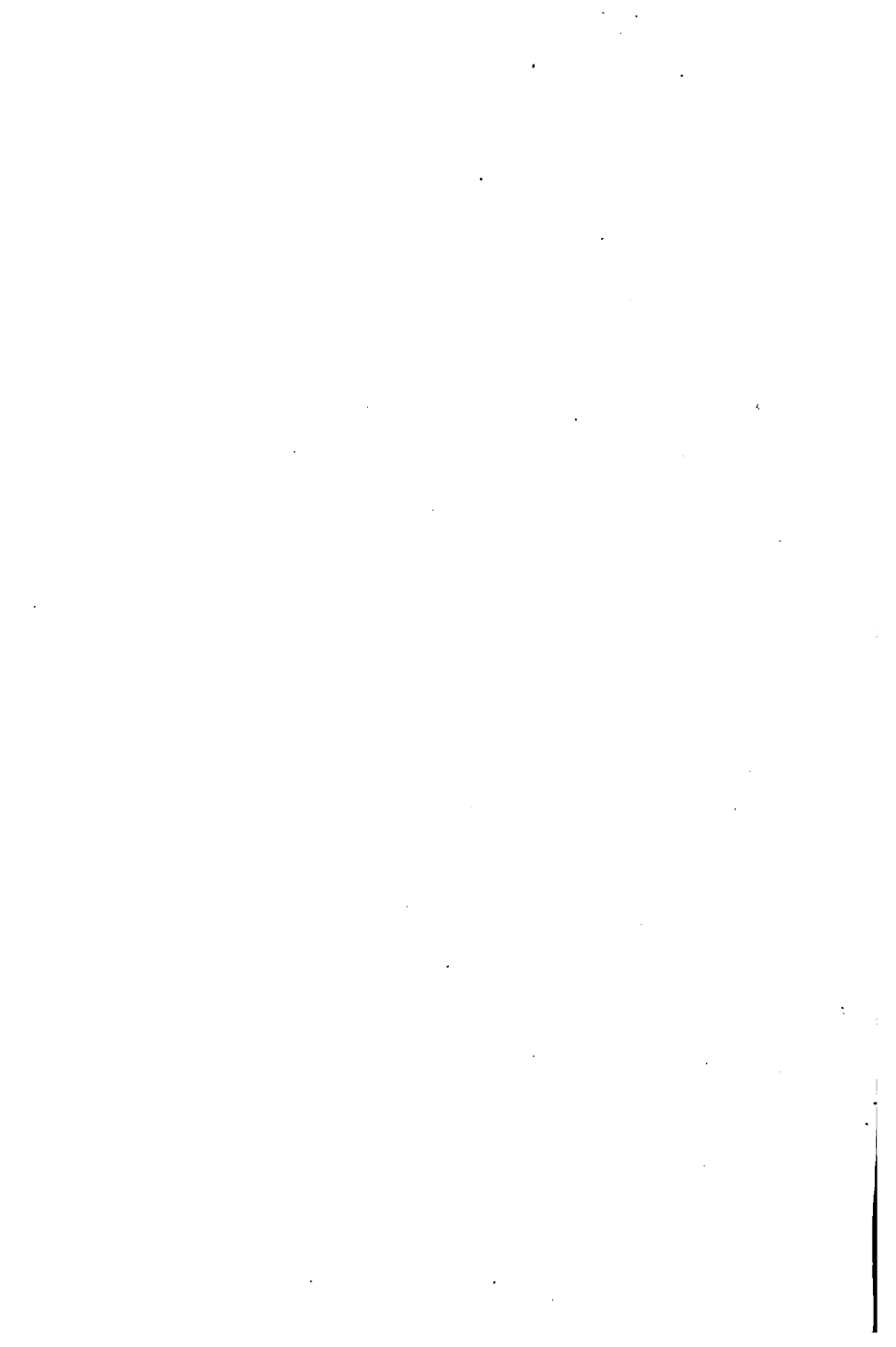
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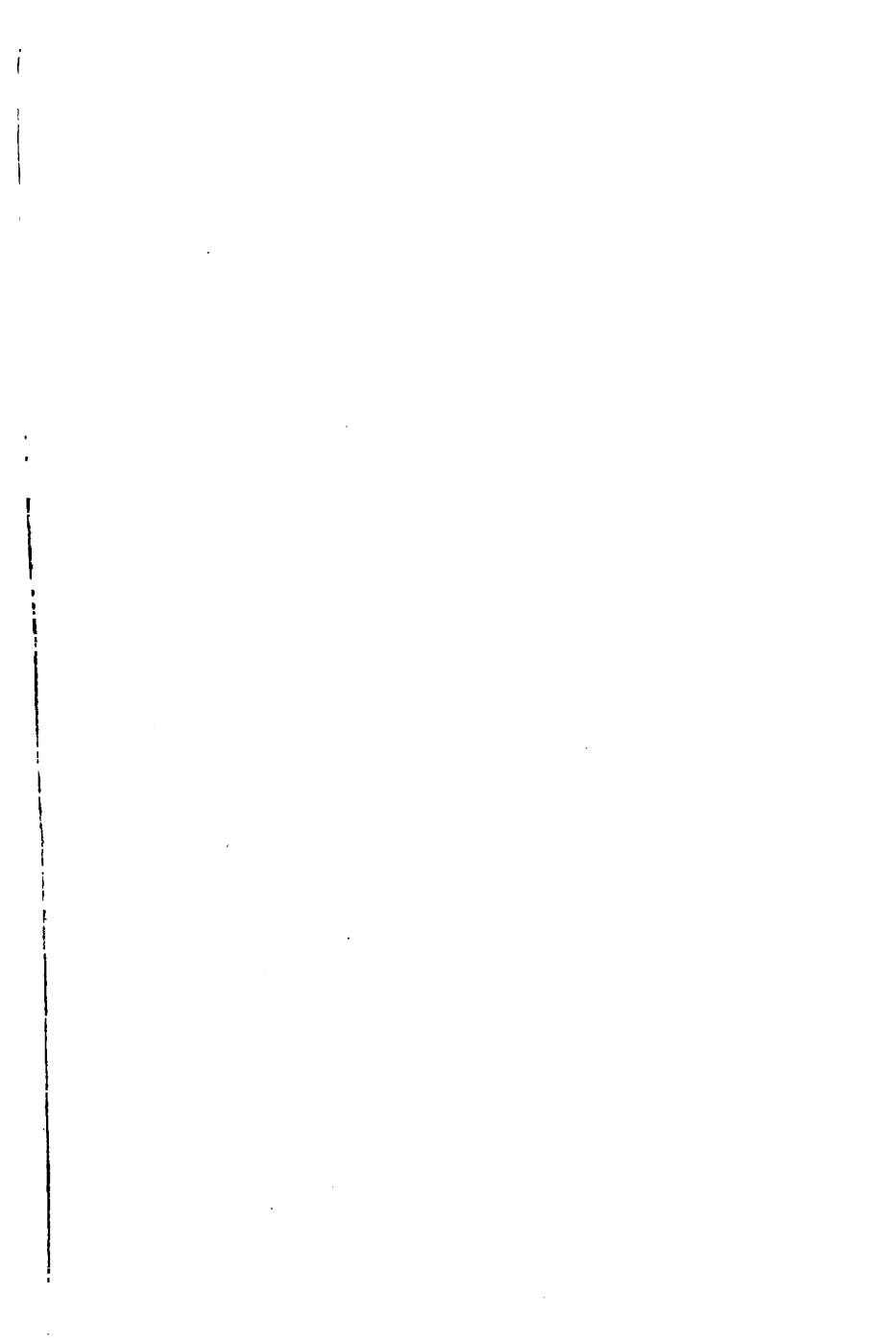
CHARLES FLEMING  
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KD 8901



**A HEART OF FLAME**







# **A HEART OF FLAME**

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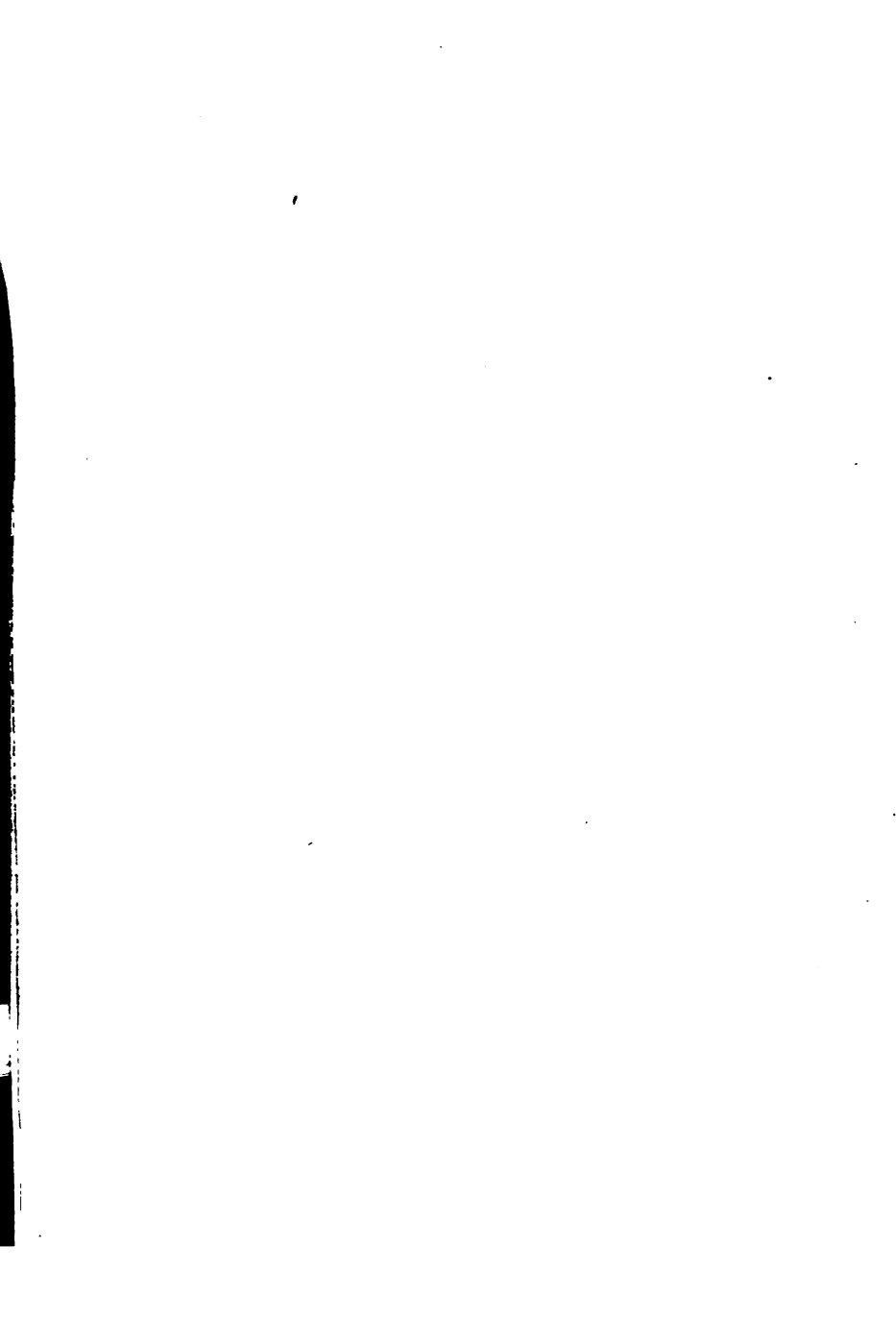
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**TO MY MOTHER**



## **A HEART OF FLAME**



# A HEART OF FLAME

## CHAPTER I

**B**EHIND a cottage in the outskirts of the city of Santa Fé a girl of fifteen was fondling a burro. She was lithe and full of life. Her dress was blue and a trifle ragged. Her black stockings and shoes were dusty. She had disengaged a load of wood from the beast's back. The sun of afternoon glistened on black locks of wind-tangled hair, heavy and long. She laughed merrily to herself, and sang. Then she heard a voice calling,

"Ramoncita!"

She saw a tall man of twenty in the street, surveying her with lazily critical gaze.

"Antonio!" cried she, in airy surprise, tossing her head and walking to the front of

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the cottage. "Did you come to see me, sir, or my sister Mathilde?"

"Neither," said Antonio, wrinkling large brows like a mastiff.

"Then you were gambling about it. Antonio," fastening on him brown eyes wherein mischief and seriousness were equally mingled, "you are so fond of betting that you would wager—well, my soul against my sister's soul."

"I should be certain to lose both," smiled Antonio. "Let me in, I have things to say."

"The idea of Antonio's having anything to say," she mused, as she led him across a deep, vine-covered corridor of shadows. They sat down in a room in which the furniture was scant. There were unfinished garments, and other evidences of the dressmaker's art, on a table.

She leaned her head upon her hand, gazed at him dreamily, and whistled a gentle little bird-like thing.

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He arose, unable to begin, and walked to a window.

"What a restless fellow," she volunteered.

"Ramoncita," he said, turning about carelessly, and facing her; "what kind of curious creature is this sister of yours?"

He was lighter than the majority of Mexicans. He was powerful and his smooth face seemed handsome.

"Is there, then, something in the world at last which can worry Antonio?" she said, laughing.

"Me? Why, you little flame-hearted witch, the whole world and all the devils couldn't do it. What difference is anything to me? The earth is pasturage for me;" he smiled a beaming and indolent smile, turning his head to one side; "and when the grass dries up, I'll be off."

"I half believe you are in love with my sister."

"Mathilde," he replied, gazing at her,

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"chills me. No. She bends her powers on this crazy brother of mine, Patricio. Ramoncita, what is she doing with Patricio?"

"How should I know?" she cried, deep-eyed and flushing.

"Well—if he must ruin himself— And now his baby is sick."

She arose, glided to him, and raised an earnest countenance to his.

"How is he ruining himself, Antonio?"

"Oh—who cares how? It's all a kind of play. It's funny sometimes."

"But how?"

"Mathilde is so crazy against the priests," he said. "Because he deserted the church she works on him. She makes him lose his head."

Ramoncita sat down, high color on her face.

"Your sister takes things seriously," he continued. "Ridiculous way to look at the world. Everything is a joke to me. She

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hates the priests with a most beautiful bitterness. She will lead Patricio into something desperate some time. If there ever comes another conflict here between the church and the liberals—they must keep out of the way of Patricio.”

She thought for a moment and laughed again.

“Mexicans,” demurely, “are always dangerous. I, too, might kill something some time.”

“When you fall in love. I should like,” he added, sighing, “to see you in love. Somehow life is in a state of unrest in Santa Fé. With Ramoncita madly in love—what a blow-up! But you are not a Mexican. Look at your face in the glass. Just a touch of olive in the white. If you are not seven-eighths an American, I shall guess no more.”

She was pensive a moment, a slim finger against her cheek, her toe tapping the floor.

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"Who knows? Mathilde says nothing. We are the lost ones. Two sisters drifting about in the world. Antonio, if anything happened to Mathilde, I should—I should die." She made a passionate movement of the arms. "*I love Mathilde!*"

He looked and saw the flash of a tear on her eyelash.

"Ah," meditated he, "you too see strange things."

She leaped up, clasped her hands with the spasmodic energy of a child, and cried:

"Bring her back!"

"Why, you plead powerfully for your sister, who goes her own iron-like way. And I had a foolish notion of pleading with you for Patricio, turned fanatic by her. You, you, Ramoncita—not I—might bring her back."

"But I can not!"

"Nor I."

"So!" cried she, casting her intensity aside

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and half singing the words as she laughed at him, "we'll let it alone!"

"But if she carried this secret struggle with the priests on to the point of danger and death,—what would Ramoncita do then?"

"Go into it with her," said she with flashing eye, a ring of sudden daring in her voice.

"Ah," quietly, "and Antonio would be found trailing along. Nothing is worth while—so I take everthing. Wait till Ramoncita falls in love."

"As you are, maybe, with Mathilde."

"No. I felt a little stirring once—but, God! she is too terrible!"

For an instant Ramoncita's changeable face looked old, strong, half tragic. Then it melted in light.

"Well, sir—never turn to me! I give you warning. If you fell in love with me—"

"I shall walk round that pit," he replied.

"Antonio," she said at length, "stop gam-

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bling. Take an interest in something. Your life is the laziest, most gracefully shameful—. How much money have you now?"

"Not one cent, little heart of flame."

"And what if you starve?"

"It's all in the play. I like a good, black play."

He wrinkled his large, mastiff-like brows again, good-naturedly, and moved to the door.

"I do not dare take the matter too seriously." He turned and, with a long, strong finger on his chin and a smile on his handsome face, added: "Else I should not sleep for thinking of Patricio, and—I might fall in love with the heart of flame. What a fool I should be!"

"Good-bye." She smiled. "It did you no good to come here. Mathilde was not at home."

"It did me one good."

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"Not one, sir!" tossing her black locks at him.

"Yes; because, as for Mathilde—well—I know that you know."

He went away, and heard her whistling like a mocking-bird behind him.

It was not without reason that she had called herself a lost one; yet, within her there was no feeling of the lost. Ignorant of her origin, her strange sister had ever seemed as ignorant as she. They had indeed drifted, a pair of wanderers. Far to the south they had lived, a life unanchored. Out of the south they had come together, the purpose that brought them buried in the breast of Mathilde. They had appeared one day of summer, two years before, in Santa Fé. The time was one of deep political and religious agitation. The unrest did not subside after Mathilde's arrival—rather it increased.

She had begun her life here as a dress-

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maker. She continued the appearances of that labor. The two girls rented this cottage at the city's edge, and lived alone. It was a half somber spot, the deep veranda eternally shaded with foliage, the red tiles stained with age. The house was small and poor, yet home-like. And Ramoncita's life in it was careless, gay, without thought. She brought fuel by means of the burro; she helped her sister; she wandered about half wild, a creature of the outdoors. That the spring which moved their lives was something of a mystery, that the source from which those lives had come was involved in no less obscurity than the point toward which they tended, she knew—but cared little. She sang her way through the world.

The very half wild nature of the city seemed to fit her. The New Mexican sky that overhangs Santa Fé is clear, the atmosphere is extraordinarily transparent, the light is strong. The town is made up of an

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old Spanish medieval portion, and a newer and Anglo-Saxon addition. But its spirit seems that of the Middle Ages. To the one side is a hill, crowned by old, neglected Fort Marcy; and in the distance the mountains, some miles away but standing over the city nevertheless, are like a huge moral force, made physical and hung against a half of the horizon. From another side stretches the plain, almost a desert, bright and brown and bare.

In all the brilliant view from the windows of Mathilde's home there was but one somber object. Yonder in the midst of the plain, lifting its four massive walls out of the earth, was the penitentiary, two miles away across the empty flat, alone, with sandy soil and sunshine to the right, and sandy soil and sunshine to the left.

A month before the sisters had taken possession of the little cottage, there had come to Santa Fé a priest called Madret. Under

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the bishop his labors kept him much about the cathedral, with which the people grew to identify him. He was of sinister and repelling presence; and it was said some foreign influence had placed him there. It was his first charge since becoming a Padre.

That Mathilde was a bitter hater of the church was soon self-evident. She was about twenty-three years of age. She showed much power of mind, much influence on those she chose to influence. Her nature was deep, unhappy. Those who came most intimately to know her were such as, having religious grievances, were led by her to oppose the clerical party. The hold she had upon her friends was strong. With the deep undercurrent of her antagonism, she fomented discord.

At the moment when Antonio left Ramoncita, Mathilde sat in the small and bare *patio* of a house some blocks from the plaza. The little corridor that ran round the court

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was dilapidated of wooden railing, unadorned. From it, open doors led into five small rooms. The tiled roof, slanting downward toward the *patio* on four sides, dark red in the morning light, was that feature of the place most reminiscent of the by-gone rule of Spain, and the Spanish architecture which, even to-day, lingers there. This was the home of Patricio Borrego, a man of Mexican blood, of a mind not uneducated, a body and a will powerful, and a disposition approaching the fanatical. His wife, a woman of thirty, sat now by Mathilde.

"Yet, Sofia," said Mathilde, whose face was pale beside the darker one of her Mexican companion, "I have been to you, to him, a friend."

"Mathilde! I never doubted it," cried Sofia, seizing the other's hand, a strained expression, deepened by a furrow between her brows, growing more marked. "You have won the faith—the affection of us all. Yet

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you have embittered Patricio. Mathilde—his mind—oh! I fear for his mind. We were once happy—yet now his life is all hate, hate for the church. I do not know you, Mathilde—I have tried to love you—I do love you;—yet against the church, the good mother of us all, have you made him mad.”

Mathilde, perhaps a shade paler, was silent. Her lips were pressed tightly together; her mouth was set. Yet her face was not devoid of beauty. She gazed in deep abstraction at the bare earth of the *patio*.

“Mathilde,” ventured Sofia at length, plaintively, her sorrow and her care sitting too unhappily upon her somewhat worn visage, “why, why have you sought this unreal, unholy course? In your heart,—and whatever you did, I would believe your heart true to us—in your heart how can you believe the church has harmed him? It has been good to him. And to me—they have been my comforters, the priests; the church has been

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my home, my solace. Mathilde—turn away from this evil mistake! Win him back for me! He has become a fanatic—and it is false, false! When his followers clamored for other than Catholic schools, and the contest ran high, and the riot occurred—Mathilde, the fine that he paid he believed was made greater by the influence of the priests, and that they had ruined him. Yet listen—I knew much better—”

She spoke lower and, leaning forward, held Mathilde’s unanswering dark eyes for a moment with her own.

“I did not dare to tell him,” she whispered, “but—the good bishop came to me secretly and, knowing we were poor and pitying me, offered me the money for the fine. And the fine was the punishment for excess against the bishop’s own cause. Mathilde,” she added sadly, “was that the oppression of the church?”

Mathilde said nothing.

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"The bishop, and all the priests, save only Father Madret, have been ever good to me, and to him. And the new one—he of the little old Chapel of San Miguel, Father Durant; he too has wished to help me. But there is no way! Oh, Mathilde, Mathilde! You have ruined all!"

The hearer only stirred slightly in her seat. There was a fine, even a sad repose on her features, the repose of one long since gone through the gamut of all argument, all reason; one whose course is inevitable. The wife arose. She was thin and slightly bent; her form was poorly dressed. Her appeal was not devoid of suppressed passion.

"For months you have made him believe it—and he was too ready to believe. For months you have talked to him, urged him on in the way of your bitter hate, made of him a fanatic, as you have made of others. And Patricio is so good, so strong, so fierce, that the thing you make him believe he will carry

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out to some fearful end. And what is it for? What harm, in God's name, has the church done him? The schools? The matter was put to vote, and they but fought for their cause. And the church itself came secretly and offered to pay his punishment, forgave him for the riot. In all the course of the church here, what evil thing can he discover? Not one! unless it be from Father Madret. Wherein has he been wronged? In nothing! Of all the priests, only one is other than his friend. Is it to the prejudice of the church that one member of it may not be holy? Must the whole religion of God be cursed because some one unholy thing crept unawares into it? Mathilde—"she fastened her eyes with much meaning on the younger woman—"is he the one you hate?—is it for Madret alone that you raise this storm?"

The other's unreadable gaze swept the restricted scene before her. Her countenance remained the same, and she did not answer.

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"Poor girl!" cried Sofia, in a burst of pity. "Though you tell me nothing, I can yet read! But why embitter him—and all the world, thus wrongly! Mathilde, I have from these same priests received much comfort. I have, in this same church, found peace. How often have I knelt on the cathedral floor, in the only place of greatness and of beauty that we poor ones have, and known that God was with me! My church—my religion—these have been my solace, these have held me up; did he but let them, these would give to Patricio, too, that peace and kindness that you have blindly shut away."

The speaker became suddenly more solemn in manner; her speech more thrilling, as she added:

"With all my soul, I say to you I know that you are wrong. Unless it lie in some human and unchurchly purpose of a single priest, the church has never harmed him—has never sought to harm."

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For some moments Mathilde sat still. Then she arose to go.

"Will you take my hand?" said she, extending it.

Tears sprang to Sofia's eyes. Despite her belief that the other's influence was against the right, she could not but love the girl, whose strange nature ever drew the hearts of those to whom it turned; whose influence was even now most remarkably proved by the tears of her companion. Sofia took the hand.

"It is a thing to be remembered," said Mathilde slowly, reading the other's emotion, "that in the very moment of your disbelief in me and your pleading for your husband—you yet forgive me. Nor do I say that I deserve it. Patricio and Antonio are coming—I will go. I am sorry that the baby is no better."

With this she went through a passage beneath the tiled roof, and departed.

## CHAPTER II

**A**T a little distance from the main plaza, and in an unprepossessing quarter of the town, there stands an ancient chapel. It is of adobe and is rude, and, were it of aught else than adobe, tottering. It is a relic of the coming of the first Spaniards.

About ten o'clock of a certain moonlight night, the moon itself, nearly full, hanging just over the earthen tower, a young priest stood in an angle at the church's corner. His attitude was one of deepest reverie, a reverie broken now and then by impulsive and restless movements of the body. His meditations seemed gloomy. He was bare-headed, and the night breeze, fresh from the mountains, blew over a forehead high and white. He was not a Mexican.

He was some yards from a narrow lane, or

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street. The bare church grounds stood four feet above the lane's level. A high picket fence upon the embankment separated the thoroughfare from the sacred ground. For a quarter of an hour there was no sound save the subdued and intermittent noises of the distant plaza. The tower's shadow on the ground crept gradually closer to the adobe wall, and seemed to crouch beneath the tower itself.

The priest suddenly turned his face toward the fence and stood attentive. From the lane below came the sound of a man's voice, suppressed but distinct, crying:

"Mathilde! Mathilde!"

The priest folded his arms at this, and bit his lower lip. At the name, the shadow of the tower upon the ground, the tower that cast it, seemed hateful to him. The sound came again:

"Mathilde!"

He crept to the church's side. There was

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deeper shadow here and he walked in it to the fence. The gloom and the height of the embankment above the street, kept him from being seen; so that he stood and watched, his arms still folded. He had no need to wonder who was Mathilde, nor to look long that he might recognize the form of the girl who stood near him in the street. She had stopped and was gazing in the direction of the voice. She was erect, and her head, bare, was thrown back.

The man who had called came running up the lane, breathless, yet with a certain stealth in his haste. He caught Mathilde's arm and held her. He was very tall and powerful, and the priest recognized Patricio Borrego.

"Don't hold me," said the girl quietly, "you see I have stopped."

"For what were you going?" asked the man in evident excitement.

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The girl did not at once reply. When she did,

"The priest," she said.

Borrego broke out into a half-hysterical stream of remonstrance. Mathilde stood unmoved until he had ceased.

"I am doing it for its mother," she said, not unkindly and with a certain set tone in her words. "It seemed to me the mother's wish is the first to be obeyed. Sofia is more crushed than you."

"She is out of her head," cried the man bitterly, "or she would never have sent you here. No, Mathilde, you are not going for the priest. The baby will die no sooner without one," he continued, growing more calm and speaking with a hard coldness, "and there is no hell for anything so little, priest or no priest."

"Which may be reasonable enough," said the girl unmoved; "but your wife wishes it.

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Come—I was not fool enough to go for the bishop, or—or that other one.”

Patricio ground his teeth.

“The bishop and Madret,” he said, his voice grating.

“The bishop and—and Madret,” she repeated, her tone unchanged. “I did not stop at the cathedral—I came here. This church is little and less powerful. This priest is new to Santa Fé. Perhaps he does not know you at all. Besides that—he is young. I have an odd fancy that not everything good has been ground out of him—yet.”

“I thought you, too, Mathilde, believed they are all bad enough. Bah—” seizing her arm again, “is it then only Madret you hate—merely Madret?”

She looked in silence into the moonlight of the street. Then she shrugged her shoulders. Her manner never changed.

“Perhaps it is all of them,” she repeated; “perhaps they are all bad enough.”

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"Now listen," he said, holding her more tightly. "You are not going to this priest, nor to any priest. There shall never again come into the house of Patricio Borrego a priest. If you tell him and he comes, I promise you I shall not let him in."

She watched him for some minutes and knew persistence was useless. She yielded as calmly as she spoke, having once decided that to argue was but to increase his half-hysterical bitterness. She was not disappointed. She respected his grief and said:

"Then go home—I shall go to mine. I will not speak to the priest."

He left her and ran away toward the plaza.

The girl passed the rear of the little church, going in the opposite direction, and came out from the shadow. Once more she heard her name called. She stopped and turned about. The black figure of the priest descended to the lane through a little gate in

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the picket fence, walked slowly out of the shadow, and came to her. They stood together in the street.

"Ah," she said, with no surprise in her voice, only a slight coldness. "Father Durrant."

"You know me then?"

"Yes," she said, "I know you."

"And all priests," he repeated, "are bad enough."

"Perhaps," she replied; her face in the moonlight was not dark. Her eyes were still.

His manner changed and he said plainly:

"I chanced to hear you. There is something that I wish to learn from your lips. There has been trouble between the Borregos and the church. Borrego's manner, to-night, filled me with horror. It is sickening that such things can be. Mathilde, I know a little of you, too—for I have seen you many times. You hate the church and the priests.

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You are a constant friend of the Borregos. I have learned something of his history—but from other priests. You think, no doubt, that the report was prejudiced. So I wish you now to tell me the story, and from Borrego's point of view. When I have heard both sides, I can judge."

"No. Good-night, Father Durant. Everything we say, you know—is a lie."

There was a little sarcasm in her tone, and she turned to go. He came and laid his hand upon her arm and stopped her. He was plainly agitated.

"Mathilde! Who calls it lies? Why do you shut yourself away so persistently? Come, I will acknowledge this much—to you whom I believe to be silent. If I hear the history from one whom I have heard you name, it is likely to have in it something of the lie indeed. And I have heard it from Madret, Madret whom you hate."

"Why do you speak of him to me?" she

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said, with a touch of haughtiness. "Madret—I do not know Madret—nor wish to. So from him it might contain lies? What are you saying, Father Durant? Is it not odd that you, a priest, should stand in the street at night with a girl who hates the church, and tell her that from him the history would be lies?"

"As for what I am saying, God knows," he replied, passing his hand over his eyes. "You said I am young—why, then, there is left in me some of the folly of youth, and, may be, a trifle of its fire. Mathilde," he continued sadly, "it has been moved before, that same folly which you say is not yet crushed—only you called it goodness. Well, it is not that. And the one who moved it—. But you will tell me of Borrego?"

"Ah—," she replied, not hearing the last question, and in calm surprise. "How, then, do you chance to belong to the church?"

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"I was brought up to belong to it," he said. "Tell me of Borrego; for you will tell me the truth."

"Odd words from a priest," she observed. "Then I am not a liar? I am not a she-devil? I am not perjured and accursed? Come—this is odd. Am I not, then, these?"

"Who in heaven's name calls you all this?" he cried.

"The church, Father Durant," with a shrug.

"For once you shall be believed," he said, his voice low. There was a strange compassion in his tones, and she fancied that he trembled. "What you tell me I shall have faith enough to know will be the truth."

She laughed a little, with no mirth.

"Very well—I shall tell you. But first I would best say plainly that I do not share your faith. I am not likely to believe that what you say is true."

"And why?"

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"Because you are a priest, Father Durrant," she replied, looking fairly and calmly at him. There was no impertinence or sarcasm in the reply.

He pressed his lip in his teeth.

"Go on," he said at last.

"The Borregos are educated—Patricio more so than Antonio. Antonio is a kind of dare-devil, and scruples bother him little enough. Then, too, he isn't married, and has no children. From the time of his education, Patricio has rebelled against the church. I think I might stop there and you would know the rest."

"Tell me all."

"He has thought more about his baby than anything else. He goes mad over the baby. He swears it, too, shall have an independent education. He swore the church schools are poor and narrow, producing ignorance rather than knowledge. He began to agi-

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tate the matter of an independent school. He has a rugged eloquence, and he went among the people talking. Some say it was I, Father Durant, who led him so to do. You see I speak with frankness. Many were won over and believed as he did. Altogether the church lost a little ground. It began to oppose Borrego and Borrego began the more to hate the church. Then he made no secret of the fact that he does not believe all that the church teaches. He called it prejudiced, and, being part Indian, he went wild and said too much. He becomes hysterical sometimes.

"The controversy increased and there was some excitement. Borrego got a crowd together one day in the plaza, not two blocks from the cathedral, and made them a speech. He was so bitter and so eloquent, that the Mexicans were half persuaded. It is well known that there was something very like a riot. That

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was the last straw. Some do say, Father Durant, that the church, or some in it, rule the sheriffs and the courts. Borrego was arrested. There were many charges against him, and untrue. He was fined a very large sum. He had made him a comfortable home and was gradually accumulating little luxuries in it. The fine took everything he had but the walls and the roof. He is a poor man.

“Well—it didn’t cure him, Father Durant; it only crushed him for a time. Sometimes I believe he has half gone mad over it all. His followers, of course, being cowards, have fallen away. He is deserted, and no opportunity is lost by—some at the cathedral, of adding to his misery. Father Durant, believe me, they do not understand that man as I do. He was honest and sincere. Now that he is crushed, the Indian in him is coming to the top. I am afraid of

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what he will do. Indians kill people, you know, Señor."

"But why do you warn them—you who hate the church?"

"I do not care to have him kill any one," she said dreamily. "No, I should not care to have him kill any one."

"Why are you his so constant adherent?"

"Because I am the she-devil. I will stay with him to the end, Señor."

Durant shuddered a little. He did not remove his eyes from her face.

"And Sofia?" he said.

"Sofia is his wife. She upheld him because she loves him; yet her beliefs are different. Rather, she blindly followed. But now the baby is near dying, and her religion overthrows everything. She only knows now, in the night, that she wants a priest."

"And Antonio?"

She laughed mirthlessly again.

"I do not know where Antonio is," she

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replied. "Who knows anything about Antonio? Good-night, Father Durant."

"How is your little sister?"

"Ramoncita?" she replied. "She is asleep. So you know Ramoncita?"

"I have ceased being a priest sometimes when she passed and have been a boy again. Yes, I know her."

"It is strange," she observed, "that you are a priest at all. It might do in the east—or elsewhere. But in Santa Fé—Father Durant—ah, in Santa Fé."

She said it as though she were thinking of something else. She started away. Scarcely knowing his own purpose he was at her side again.

"Mathilde!" he cried, "you have told me all this—and nothing of yourself. If I am to do anything for him or for you—I must know it all. Why, then, do you, too, hate the church?"

She merely looked at him.

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"Good-night, Father Durant," she said, moving away.

"You will not?" he cried. "What can I do if I do not know? You, too, have been wronged. It is not the bishop, who is good; no, nor all priests, though you tell me you hate the church—Is it Madret?"

She looked at him again and long. Then she turned and, almost running, disappeared beyond a rise in the lane.

Durant walked slowly back to the church. His brow was hot. He realized that he had scarcely known what he did. He half stumbled up the embankment and through the little gate into the church grounds. At the door, which was still in shadow, he paused, and sat down upon the step. Borrego and the girl were always in his mind. He was oppressed. The heat that seemed like fever increased. He leaned against the adobe wall and stared for hours into the moonlight. At two o'clock in the morning

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he arose and went toward the structure at that side of the church opposite the street, the rooms designed for his use. Mathilde's face was burned into his brain.

"If the baby dies," thought he, "Borrego may be softened. I shall then make one effort to be admitted to the house."

Even to him had she brought doubt—a doubt that was monstrously to grow and influence him. Her bitterness, unjust; her hate, too sweeping; bore with them a towering sincerity to themselves so true that it threw on all the distortion of her beliefs, a winning glamour of reality. By her fascination for Durant that night, she did to the priesthood, wronged already by the presence in its holiness of one unholy father, a mightier wrong. For Durant, like the bishop, like the best spirit of whatsoever world religion, was bent on doing good. She went her way, wrapped in brooding mood, the fruitful seed of ruin sown behind her.

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And the town, divided as it was in hostile camps—it being a time of political, as of religious, strife—the town, could it have read them, would have shuddered at her thoughts.

### CHAPTER III

**B**ETWEEN eight and nine o'clock of the same night there had been a burst of music in the plaza. Some saint received the merry adoration of a populace not yet weaned from Spanish customs. The trees and shrubbery of that central court were agleam with fantastic lights. The streets were gay and full of an untamed life. Sin was rampant; innocent pleasure and pure happiness passed it by, breathing the same sweet mountain air. Every shade and degree of human color, from that of the pure Anglo-Saxon to that of the pure Indian, and through all the gradations of their mixture, was represented. The city was a bit of old Spain, rather of old Mexico, isolated, far removed, held high up toward the semi-tropic brilliance of stars, but curiously modified by that strong infusion of the northern blood.

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Antonio Borrego, indolent, graceful as always, wandered through the plaza. His eye, though dreamy with that shadow that ever hangs over the Indian's soul, held yet the alertness of some other race. His features were strong and clear. A wave of black hair hung over a high forehead, half hidden by a wide gray sombrero.

Antonio was a little discontented with himself.

"The band is gaudy," mused he. "The musicians look like fools, puffing away. What is the good of it? Doubtless this saint was no better than you, Antonio Borrego, you blasphemer."

The crowds failed to divert him. He rattled ten dollars in his pocket.

Antonio had once been a cowboy. His deeds were then irregular, unsatisfactory. He had once owned a little tract of land, but had absent-mindedly played it away in one long lazy night with some Frenchmen. He

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had then traveled a little and somehow taken possession of a *hacienda* in Chihuahua. He had found life too pointless down there. What were cattle to him? He loved to roam, and dream, and fight occasionally. They say he slew some ruffian, boldly, and well, and deservedly; slew him with a fierce, keen, quick joy. The ruffian had ill-treated a girl. So Antonio turned up again in Santa Fé. What was the use of bothering about anything? What was the use of doing anything in particular? Yet to-night a shadow was on him. He had a certain picture in his mind; and his heart stirred,—if lazily.

In a narrow side street where the lights were dimmer and adobe walls were black, he paused at an open door. The room was full of lamps and a fog of smoke. Glittering roulette wheels spun their artificial webs of fortune. The chink of coin came to his ears. He was not tempted. There was no temptation or desire about it. It was just

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an uninterested impulse that seemed natural. He did not care anything about money. He towered in the doorway, entered, and staked half of his ten dollars.

The uncouth crowd hailed him with delight.

"Here's that smiling devil, Antonio!" cried one.

"Now for high play!" shouted another.

They crowded about him. He lost his ten dollars.

"What a worthless fellow you are, Antonio," whispered a friend's voice, barely heard in the noise of the place, "to come and lose your last cent." The speaker was a round, red, pudgy person, who wheezed.

Antonio smiled benignly.

"If you knew how comfortable it is to be worthless, Jimpse," said he.

He went to the door and out. He was, however, not comfortable. He moved along in his customary lordly way; but he still had

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a certain picture in his mind, and scrutinized it with a heavy feeling about his heart.

At last, as though mere chance had brought him, he came to the edge of the city where a trail led away over the half-desert lands to the mountains. He paused and whistled a Mexican air. And there beside him was a little cottage, vine-swathed, wrapped in the deep night shadows. He opened a gate and went among straggling shrubs to the corridor. All was black. He paused and caviled lightly at himself. A little chink in the door—far under the corridor's tiled roof—let out a gleam of yellow. He found the step before the door and held his hand out several minutes, before he decided to knock. He had no more than decided when the stillness was broken by a girl's voice within, singing a gentle song:

*"See! the white moon shines on high;  
Whiter is my true love's shroud,  
Whiter than the morning sky,  
Whiter than the evening cloud—"*

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She trilled the last line and let it wander away in untamed vagaries. All was still again. He knocked.

Silence. He knocked again.

"Who is it?" asked she, apparently not in the least afraid.

"Antonio."

"Oh."

Silence a long time. Then he heard her moving a chair and sitting down with elaborate noises.

"Well," volunteered Antonio, "aren't you going to do something with me?"

"Why, certainly not," said she brightly.

"Ramoncita, I'm lonesome."

"There is revelry in the plaza," she said, her voice accompanied by the sound of her rocking, comfortably.

"It isn't the right kind. Aren't you going to let me in?"

"Of course not."

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"I have something on my mind, Ramoncita."

At this he heard her laugh. The laugh was long and high and exceedingly full of fun. It seemed she rocked to and fro and laughed and laughed again. Never, thought he, was anything in the world as merry as she.

"What are you laughing at, and I standing here in the dark?"

"Then sit down on the step."

"I'll sit down, then, Ramoncita, if you will bring your chair to the door and sit down close to me."

"Shall we talk through the door?" she asked.

"Yes; I'll tell you what is on my mind through the door."

Her high rippling laugh, merry as a waterfall in the morning, came to him again. He heard her draw the chair near the door.

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"I am sat down, Antonio," said she.

"What a little tantalizer you are."

"What is on your mind, Antonio?"

"I have just left Mathilde," said he.

She was silent some minutes.

"Ah," she said, and sighed.

"Mathilde is at Patricio's."

She was silent again. He pictured her unseen face, bright in the lamplight; masses of black hair; a pink flush; a keen, highly strung mind, alert and full of passionate life, looking out of deep brown eyes. He saw nothing.

"What was on your mind?" she repeated after a while, trilling another laugh.

"Aren't you going to let me in, little witch?"

"No. You talk through the door."

"Well, Mathilde was with Patricio. Ramoncita, the baby is getting worse. If it dies, I'm afraid of Patricio."

"Why?"

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"Something will happen about the priests. She has maddened him so. To begin with, he won't have the baby baptized. And Sofia is crazy over this. She's afraid it will be damned. Then, there is one priest, Madret, who runs things here when the bishop is away. The bishop is away now. Madret hates Patricio as much as he hates Mathilde. I think, Ramoncita, that he has laid a plot. He knows that Patricio will not have the child baptized. He believes that if the baby dies, grief will crush its father. He fancies that Patricio would then do anything to save the baby's soul—if not before, then after. He announces that he has a special dispensation from the pope, giving him power to save the souls of certain babies by the sprinkling with holy water after death. If grief crushes Patricio, and the baby dies, and Sofia believes all that and begs for it; maybe Patricio will give in. Well—you know what Madret could do."

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"I never heard of such a dispensation!" she cried excitedly. "What would he do?"

"He could take their last cent in payment."

"Well?"

"Come closer."

He heard her breathing at the keyhole. He brought his cheek there and felt her breath. He sighed, and closed his eyes.

"Well, what is it?" she asked.

He awoke.

"It is this. Ramoncita, I think Madret has deceived the Catholic church. I don't believe he is a priest at all."

"This is what was on your mind, Antonio!" she observed presently, in a tone of childish gentleness.

"Yes."

A long silence.

"Antonio," half whispered; her voice very sweet.

"What?"

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"I'll never laugh at you again, Antonio."

He threw the oppression from his mind.

"Good-night!" she called suddenly, evidently moving away.

"So the witch is only a voice," answered he.

"Good-night!" she sang from an unseen distance.

He departed. Though neither recognized the other because of the gloom, he passed Mathilde in the street.

## CHAPTER IV

**T**HE following afternoon Antonio went by the Catholic cathedral that lay a block beyond the plaza.

The sun was hot upon the stones and the marble pillars. The great doors were closed. The light fell yellow on bare steps. Antonio cursed a little to himself, and passed on.

He entered the plaza. The salesmen in their shirt sleeves were standing about the shops. The paths through the plaza's center, the seats beside them, the statue of the hero in the middle, were cool under the shade of trees. Antonio walked erect, yet musing, toward the statue. Mathilde was seated on a bench beneath the hero's feet, and Antonio sat down beside her. The passers-by were few.

The girl was white. There was a peculiar

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quality to the color like that of snow just at the point of melting.

"You should not be here," she said. She had not looked at Antonio. One would have thought she had not seen him. She sat looking at a cactus that grew in the plaza, and rubbing her lower lip absently. Her voice was low, almost languid.

"Why?" said Antonio, eying her sharply.

"Because Patricio's baby is going to die."

"Oh!" said Antonio, "what can I do if it is?" he asked after a pause.

"Do? I do not know—but you could be there."

She turned her eyes upon him at this. They were nearly black and very large. They seemed, however, not quite clear. Some mistiness was over them.

"Well," said Antonio, "I shall go presently."

"Presently the baby will be dead," replied

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Mathilde, still with the odd languor in her voice.

She began passing her finger across her lower lip again and looked away over the plaza. She seldom allowed her face any trace of expression. It was always calm, usually inscrutable, showing nothing save that she was mistress of herself.

Antonio smiled a smile in which there was as much darkness as light, and, saying no more, arose and departed. He turned from the plaza into that portion of San Francisco Street leading away from the section he had lately left. This part of the street was characterized by the old time Spanish narrowness. An ordinary carriage could not have turned in it. Little carts and the inevitable burro were the means of traffic. The shops were welded together and seemed crushed with age. There were Indians here and there selling fruit and pottery.

Antonio walked briskly, with his head up.

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He was accosted by numerous passers-by. Some one at the Old Curiosity Shop shouted to him familiarly; he stopped to chat with a Mexican barber; he helped an old woman on with her intractable burro. He had an air of freedom about him which attracted attention, even admiration. Having walked almost the entire length of the street, he turned a corner between low dwellings and came abruptly to his brother's house. It wore an air of modest thrift without; but the rooms were bare.

There was a hush within as Antonio opened the door. A number of neighbors and friends sat mute and despondent about the walls. The room was in shadow, and one could see through a half open door into another apartment still darker. No one spoke when the young man came in, and he found a chair by the farther door and sat down. The sound of low voices came now and then from the other room, and once or twice An-

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tonio heard the sob of a woman. He had half a mind to go in, and almost arose to do so, but altered his intention and sat still. The silence was very oppressive. There were three old women sitting against the wall opposite him, and a Mexican girl with a handkerchief to her eyes in the corner. Presently the person next him leaned forward and whispered loudly:

"Reckon it can't hold out more'n a half hour."

The speaker was a small, despondent looking man, with a heavy body. He was an American.

"Who are there?" asked Antonio, also whispering.

"Patricio and its ma, and I reckon a doctor. It's its stomick." He looked with much dejection at the floor and shook his head dubiously.

"Turrible thing—stomicks," he whispered again after a while, watching Antonio.

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"You're right, Jimpse," said Antonio.

Jimpse had a way of shutting both eyes in an expression of pain.

"I ought to know," he whispered. "I've had 'em."

"Had what?" inquired Antonio.

"Times with my stomick—all kinds o' times, Antonio." He crossed his legs heavily, leaned toward the Mexican, and hung his thumb in his vest. "Tell you what," he said, "there aint one other thing that can wear a man out like it. For fifteen years I aint been any account." He closed his eyes again, opened them, and looked about, depressed. Jimpse was a teamster. In a dilapidated stable, somewhere across an alley at the rear, stood two great, awkward horses which Mr. Jimpse was accustomed to drive. Some minutes went by with no sound but the voices from the other room.

"Eat too much," whispered Jimpse.  
"Can't help it. Now I reckon on one bowl o'

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'tole and when I git that et I'm into it somehow and all broke up fer stoppin', and another one goes. Then I aint got any head fer the rest o' the day."

He propounded his theory with deep seriousness. Antonio was listening to the voices from the other room. At length two men and one of the women departed, and a little later two other men arrived. The Mexican girl still sniffled in the corner, the men sat down, and the same blank silence reigned.

"House is a lot barer 'n it used to be, aint it?" whispered Mr. Jimpse.

Antonio nodded. He of the stomach leaned nearer the Mexican again.

"Why," he said, "I recollect mighty plain once when I come in here and there was carpets on the floor; and I'll tell you what," putting his hand to his mouth, "I recollect a gold watch right there on that chimney shelf. Yes sir, right there—you know."

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"They are all gone now," said Antonio.

"Fer the fine?" asked Jimpse.

"For the fine," said Antonio.

"I recollect the day he made the speech and what a turrible time there was. I never could make out what real right they had to arrest him."

"There was a priest at the bottom of it."

"Sh!" whispered Mr. Jimpse, looking warily about. "I believe in bein' mighty careful. I've heard 'em say so. I heard Ma-thilde say so, and she made Patricio believe it. Them as don't like the priests has been bitterer 'n gall ever since. Why, it looks like half the town hates the other half. Looky here, a few more men like him and the people'd turn against the priests out and out. Yes, sir. It aint right, Tony. They'd gif the worst of it. May be the priests can damn 'em to hell. What good is anything to a feller in hell?"

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"Patricio doesn't believe," replied Antonio.

"Sh! It's the worse fer him. I think a heap o' Patricio—always did. Stuck by him a heap, and will yet, long as it aint draggin' me into any of his hot talk. But he's straight for being damned. Well, it aint my business. Now, you're different. You aint any Catholic o' no kind. Priests aint reckonin' much on you either way.'

The woman was sobbing uninterruptedly now in the next room. Jimpse listened for a time and then turned again to Antonio.

"Is he stripped clean down to nothin' fer the fine?"

"It's precious little there is left," said Antonio, "hardly a thing—and the medicine and the doctor."

"And now the funeral," said Jimpse.

"Yes, and now the funeral."

"Who'll pay fer the sprinklin'?"

"I don't know."

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"Why," leaning over in unhealthy interest, "aint he got enough fer the sprinklin'?"

"*Dios sabe*. Five dollars? It's the only five, if he has."

"Why say—the baby 'll be damned without the sprinklin'."

"Patricio can believe that—but I don't."

"I never heard it neither," replied Jimpse with something of excitement in his whispers, "till the new priest, Madret, got to runnin' things at the cathedral. Say—I thought it used to be said the sprinklin' o' the dead jist helped the soul along, that's all. And the bishop, he's a good man, and he sprinkled 'em fer nothin'. But since the bishop's been away—a month it is—I hear there's a new rule. Madret's changed it. Five dollars apiece; and I reckon them as don't pay, goes to hell—Mathilde says."

There was suddenly a louder sob from the woman in the next room, followed by the groan of a man. A hasty moving about fol-

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lowed, and the woman's voice again, broken and hysterical, echoed through the house. Antonio arose and approached the darker room, hesitating. With a slight effort he made himself enter. The despair within seemed like some physical thing which rose at him and pushed him away. On a rude bed by the shaded window lay the baby, its brown face still in death, the doctor beside it. Sofia, thin and haggard with prolonged distress, was moaning over the child. Patricio sat rigid by the window, his powerful face set, his eyes on the bed.

"Is—is he dead?" asked Antonio, with more timidity than he had ever before shown.

"Yes," said the doctor, putting on his hat, "he is dead."

It was some time before Antonio could say more. He felt helpless and out of place. He had never understood nor thought anything about babies. But this black sorrow was a thing too powerful not to be realized.

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It was here in front of him; he was looking at it. His heart being very much moved, he looked from one to the other of them. He had never seen Sofia so completely broken down. There was, too, something terrible in Patricio's silence. He could not bear to be still longer; he stepped hastily to the mother, and touched her on the arm.

Sofia was kneeling beside the bed now, with her face buried in the sheets close against the little one. Her body was shaking. With a quick start she turned her head at the touch of Antonio. Her face was thin and swarthy, but strong. Her eyes were deep set and black, and between them, low down on the forehead, the deep furrow still lent a strange, strained expression to the whole countenance. Her present grief augmented it.

"Is there anything that I can do?" whispered Antonio gently.

She did not seem to hear him, but turned

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again, sobbing, to the child. Antonio stepped hesitatingly to the father.

"Patricio," he said.

There was no answer from the figure by the window. Antonio touched him lightly on the shoulder, but his brother did not move.

"Patricio, it is I, Antonio—is there anything that I can do?"

For several seconds Patricio did not show that he had heard. Then his eyes wandered slowly to Antonio's face. There was an expression in them that made the younger man tremble. But Patricio only looked away again and buried his head between his huge hands, with the fingers, long and slim, and whiter than his face, showing among the locks of hair.

The doctor moved about, gathering up his few possessions preparatory to departure. Antonio stood and looked long at the child upon the bed. He began to feel some-

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thing of what it must mean, and he turned and rested his head upon his hand against the wall. He would have liked to kneel down by his brother or by Sofia, and say or do something. But he had never done anything like that; he would doubtless do the wrong thing; they were in an atmosphere unfamiliar to him—and, *Dios!* we must all die!

The doctor came close to Antonio and whispered:

“I couldn’t get them to send for a priest.”

Antonio was about to reply when he perceived that his brother had lifted his head and was looking at them. The latter arose suddenly and strode across the room. He was very tall. His eyes were a little wild and his lips tightly pressed. There was no inconsiderable similarity between his appearance and that of his brother. But Patricio’s shoulders were a trifle broader, his face larger, square of chin, displaying hard-

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ness of outline where his brother's showed an almost youthful carelessness.

"Not any priest!" he broke out abruptly, his voice hard. He stopped in the middle of the room and pointed with outstretched palm to the bed where the mother clasped the child. "Look at them!" he said, "look at them now. Under the protection of the church—Ha! ha!—the church! No—not any priest; my God! don't bring one here!"

The man was too much unnerved to control himself. His laugh was bitter to wildness. He sank into the chair and buried his face again with a piteous sigh.

The doctor stroked his beard, looked about the bare apartment and from one to the other of its occupants, and went away. Antonio walked for a moment into the room where the despondent sympathizers sat about the wall. Mr. Jimpse arose, and with his hand to his mouth whispered loudly:

"Is it done fer?"

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Antonio said in a low voice:

"Friends, the baby is dead."

The Mexican girl sniffled much more. The old women and one or two of the men arose and went into the death chamber.

"Now if I'd been any account," whispered Jimpse, following Antonio, who was walking aimlessly about the room, "maybe I could 'a done somethin'. Neighbors, you know. But it's the stomick keeps a feller's head from bein' clear."

He stopped in the middle of the room with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his face the picture of despondency.

"Eat too much," he said presently.

There was a knock at the street door and Antonio opened it. Jimpse could hear a man's voice without, in conversation with Antonio.

"But I thought I might do something," it was saying. "I have heard his history and resolved to come. If he will but believe me

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—and I say it in the name of God and the bishop—the church is ready to give him whatsoever help he needs, be it spiritual or temporal.”

“But look here,” said Antonio, “he won’t have any of you. No use to talk about it.”

There was more discussion, which soon ceased, and Antonio closed the door. As he did so, there was a cry from Sofia in the next room.

“Don’t! Don’t! Patricio—no, no, no!”

Patricio’s tall form loomed in the bedroom doorway, with his wife clinging to him. His face was a study of suppressed passion and excitement. Mr. Jimpse backed against the wall; some of the friends with frightened faces came to the door behind Patricio.

“Who was he?” cried the distracted father, shaking his hand at the closed street door, his eyes shining dangerously. “Who was he? Curse them! Curse them!”

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"Patricio! Patricio!" sobbed Sofia, "come back—it's nothing!"

"Why see here, man," said Antonio, taking his brother's arm with perfect calmness, "I sent him away. He wasn't like that other one. But you see he isn't here. Come on now, come on, Sofia; come back into the other room."

"Don't you dare let him come near; don't any of you dare—do you hear, all of you?" cried Patricio, still staring at the closed door, his wife holding to him. "You know me—never a one of them here!"

The miserable Jimpse pushed his back more flatly against the wall and thrust his hands more deeply into his pockets. The Mexican girl and the women were huddled together.

"No, of course not," said Antonio with assurance, now drawing his brother away. "Not a one of them—we all know that. Come now; come on now; there."

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Patricio was at last seated beside the bed, his eyes wandering restlessly about the room or fixed at times in a stupor on the form among the white sheets. Later, Sofia drew the younger brother out into the little corridor that surrounded the *patio*. She sank exhausted with her head upon the railing. Antonio stood and looked down at her.

"It's almost made him crazy," said Sofia. "God help us, I'm almost crazy myself."

Antonio looked up at the evening sky and down into the shade of the *patio*; and then again at Sofia.

"Likely enough," he said; "likely enough."

"He'll have a fever after this," continued Sofia. "I know how it always works. He'll be down with it to-night. It's coming on now. What am I going to do, Antonio?"

"Why, we'll get along. I can help about and do almost anything, you know. Then there's Mathilde."

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"But maybe she doesn't dare. Oh, I wish I were dead!"

"Don't talk that way. It wouldn't do any good. As for Mathilde, she'd dare anything. I'll see that she comes."

"It seems that we haven't any friends anywhere, Antonio."

"You've more than you think—but most of them are cowards. This cursed town is full of ignorant cowards."

"Antonio, we haven't a dollar in the house, and nothing to sell."

Antonio knit his brows.

"Neither have I, Sofia."

"You aren't against us too!" cried the woman, looking up at him piercingly, the strained expression more marked on her face.

Antonio smiled gloomily.

"You know very well, girl, I'd give you anything I had. What good is it to me? Anything is a part of the play to me. Haven't I acted always right?"

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"You've got a good heart, only it is wild. What have you done with your money, Antonio?"

"Gambled it."

"You ought to keep away from such, boy. Times like this make me know it. O God! what is going to become of us!"

"Don't look at it so black. You have friends. Mathilde—that woman, Mathilde, is a whole army. Besides, maybe I can get some money."

"It seems to me that there isn't anything anywhere but misery. I can't see any hope, Antonio. Everything looks bare and terrible somehow. O baby! baby! baby! Have to keep up, though, for Patricio. That's the worst of it. There's no hope of dying and getting rid of it. I'll do anything for Patricio. Antonio, he's the best man that the Lord ever made, if he does do wrong. I'll stick to him till it kills us both. They say

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he's going straight to hell. If he does, I'll go with him."

The evening came on and the dusk with it. Jimpse still stood miserably against the wall. At last Antonio entered the house again. Jimpse slowly sidled up to him, and with his hand to his mouth whispered hoarsely:

"I'm feelin' turrible. I'm goin' to be careful after this. I'm goin' to begin with supper and eat jist about half. I've got it to do. Now look here—you see I wasn't no good. I couldn't do nothin'. Head wasn't clear. You had it all to do, and me standin' against the wall unable to move. Think a heap o' Patricio too. It's miserable. If I can stop with one bowl, Tony, I'll have some-  
thin' to hope fer. I've swore it a hundred times, but I'll do it this time." He made a phlegmatic motion of disgust with his hand.  
"Aint worth nothin'. Feel all heavy.

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Despondent as always he at length took his departure, saying no more. The other gloomy sympathizers followed, the Mexican girl weeping excessively, the old women silent as the grave itself, the men awkward and aimless of movement.

It was dark at last and Antonio lit one small lamp and set it near the bed. Patricio still sat rigid. Sofia wandered about from time to time, or looked upon the child, or sank beside the bed. The knob of the outside door quietly turned and Mathilde entered. It was like a breath of relief to them all. Even Patricio looked up and his eyes were less wild. There was the never absent calmness on Mathilde's face as she went quietly to work. She saw that they had had nothing to eat and searched out a few things for supper. The meal was scanty enough and she had some difficulty in persuading the stricken parents to partake. But her calm-

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ness carried with it an authority they in the end obeyed.

"Now," she said at last, when the supper was cleared away, "Sofia, you must go to bed."

"Not any place but here, Mathilde!"

"Very well," said Mathilde. "You may sleep here, Patricio."

Patricio did not move.

"Come, Patricio."

He turned his eyes upon her. She saw the light of the fever in them, and touching his hand she felt that it was hot.

"You must come and lie down and rest, Patricio."

"I can't, Mathilde."

"You can and must. You will be sick. Come."

The very placidness of the authority lent it force. She took his arm and he arose. She led him to a little room across the *patio*,

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arranged the bed for him, bade him good-night, and returned.

"You need not stay, Antonio," she said.

"Aren't you afraid?"

Mathilde merely smiled and turned to Sofia.

"Will you stay all night?" asked Antonio.

"Till very early in the morning."

Antonio looked again about the room. He did not care to go—he had an inexplicable desire to stay. But there was nothing for him to do. Mathilde was bending over Sofia, who had sunk again with her arms about the child. He could see the baby's still face with its mother's hair falling about it. There was no sound without or within, and the lamp burned dimly, but half displaying the barrenness of the room. Antonio turned and crossed the outer apartment, went out into the night, and closed the door.

This part of the city was very quiet. He could hear the faint hum of busier quarters

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toward the plaza. The stars shone brilliantly and a breeze from the mountains fanned his face. He stood for a moment outside the door.

"What are babies, anyhow?" he thought.

Finding no answer to the question either in the adobe wall beside him, or the earth beneath, or the stars overhead, he put his hands in his pockets and walked away.

## CHAPTER V

**A**BOUT nine o'clock of that same night there were two priests in a little room behind the cathedral.

The apartment formed a portion of that large and rambling structure devoted to the temporal uses of the bishop. On the wall hung a white crucifix, painted blood glistening from the wounds of the Christ. Nothing else in the furnishings suggested the ecclesiastical character of the occupants of the place. A small, curiously carved table supported a huge candle under a red shade. A few chairs, carved like the table, barely relieved the unhomelike appearance of the room. The elder of the priests sat directly behind and facing the light.

His appearance was singular, not prepossessing, yet making in time an impression on the observer somewhat akin to fascination.

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His forehead was high, yet sloping slightly backward. The eyebrows were heavy, deeply shading a pair of remarkably intense eyes, eyes whose exact shade it would have been difficult to name. The mouth, which was large but with thin lips, usually wore a smile; a smile failing in what might have been imagined its purpose of dispelling the unpleasant impression of the eyes. The chin was prominent, slightly irregular in contour, and clean-shaven. The complexion of the whole face was pale, unnaturally so; but the lower portion of it lost its paleness in that bluish-black appearance so often seen on the faces of men who keep a heavy beard closely shaved. From the base of the nose a line or wrinkle, extending about each corner of the mouth, lent a seeming of increased age to the entire countenance. The man was unhealthy, restless. He watched his companion constantly.

"The ways of this western country," he

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said, his words sharp and decisive, "let me assure you, you do not know. Here danger lurks, here opposition is subtle and fierce. Father Durant, I know my course."

"Yet the bishop—who is absent—would ever oppose that course," replied Durant firmly. "The church itself is revolted by it."

The thin lips of Madret seemed sinuously restless over white teeth. There was a lurking fire in his eyes. His answer burst from him as from one hard pressed.

"How little, then, you know the bishop! These duties are mine, not his. Yet he sanctions them. He has lived here long. He knows the force that gathers to antagonize him. Durant—" he spoke low and laid a slim hand in the candle light upon the table—"he has ordered the following of this course—to crush the rebels."

The lie was well timed. The eyes of the Christ looked down on the liar. The doubt, sown by Mathilde, was working in Durant.

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The latter shifted in his chair; there was an expression of grief on his face; he was ill at ease.

"My age—twenty-six—may be a tender one," said he, in a tone that contradicted the words—"particularly here. Nor could I pretend to know the ways of this territory as do the bishop and Father Madret. But I do know, and know well, that which is unjust, unpriestly, contrary to the action of the church whose mission it is, here and elsewhere, to assist the lowly. And here, I know, under the rule of your fellows and your superiors," he paused and looked at his listener with deep eyes, "violated only of late, the church's purposes have been more pure."

Something like an instantaneous flash lit up Madret's face, but he smiled and rubbed his fingers together.

"Come, come!" he said, turning a quick, fox-like look on his arraigner. "Your zeal is mistaken. You have not learned these

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people. The church can not, can not, I say, free itself entirely from politics. And the party that desires free schools, that bears infidels like a monster in travail—is seeking (will you not see it?)—seeking my—seeking the destruction of the church's agents."

"So you wreak your vengeance," said Durant, "on the baby that died to-day, Borrego's baby." His face wore an expression yet more strained. The features showed a combination of delicacy and strength. His black hair was thick over a high forehead. His eyes were gray; the chin was Grecian; the nose, a trifle too large but not marring the beauty of the face. "You will, then, insist, to-morrow, on the payment of the money?"

Madret arose and paced the room with nervous tread.

"What, then," cried he, exasperated and passionate, driven to bay, losing his head, "would you have me do? The hounds are

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upon me—they seek to devour me. The representatives of that party have all but compassed my destruction! It is retaliate or die!”

He recovered himself at once. He paused, the red light from the shade resting with an effect almost ghastly on his distorted countenance. There was perspiration on his brow. He looked at Durant and smiled with his sinuousness of lip.

“You see I lose myself. I talk a little crazily, Durant.”

The strangely displayed passion, even fury of his words, Durant had been unable to interpret. The man before him was a mystery. Feeling that he was beating against a rock, he arose. The scene of the previous night still hung in his mind. He felt himself filled and dominated by a mixture of incompatible emotions. Last night’s most prominent figure influenced him, he knew, and gained its prominence, not from last night alone, but

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from other occasions as well. He could not admit, even to himself, that a part of the force that led him to-day to Borrego's house, was the possibility of her presence there. He had always known himself so much more masterfully strong than that. It was no knowledge, then, or thought; only a feeling, of a force that was drawing him; a force inducing an unacknowledged sickness, a contempt for Madret, for the superiors whom this man had misrepresented, for these very walls.

"Then I have but this to say, Father Madret," said he, standing before him. "I have seen enough to convince me that there is something very like oppression here."

"Said like a boy," retorted Madret. There was a touch of sarcasm in his tone as he added: "And what are you going to do, Father Durant?"

"I had hoped we could do it together. If

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your course is set—then I leave you to it. Your power is greater than mine.”

“My way is set,” replied the other, seating himself with affected languor by the table.

“And without the holy water, and its price—they have been assured of damnation?”

Madret’s face assumed an extra shade of pallor; yet he smiled faintly.

“It is to show my power at the critical moment—now, once for all. To see who is to conquer, the church or the fanatics—To crush, or be crushed!” said he, his voice low.

“This is a stain upon the fair face of the Catholic church!” cried Durant, with heat. “Let me say at once—I shall ever be antagonistic to your methods. I am glad that the church is not in other places as I have seen it here. Good-night, sir.”

When he had gone, the keen-eyed Madret sat tapping his slim fingers on the table.

“It is not he—not he whom I fear,” he

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muttered. "And will the other, after this long haunting, drive me out at last?"

He arose at length and took a little key from his pocket. He rubbed its polished surface with his fingers, musingly, and his eyes held a repellent light. He went into a distant room, the bishop's most private apartment. Carrying the candle, he came to an oaken cabinet, and unlocked it. From it he drew a letter addressed to the bishop himself. Madret's suspicious nature had early led him to these secrets. That which he found in the cabinet, he had read some hours before. His eyes devoured it now again. It was from those churchly authorities immediately superior to the bishop. A portion of its contents was as follows:

"The unpriestly conduct you have laid before us is in itself sufficient to demand most serious action. We regret that through our influence, misdirected as we were deceived, he is in the place he has disgraced. As we

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say—your evidence of corruption, of political intrigue, of debasement of the church's power, distortion of its prerogatives, unchristian antagonism to the poor in your absence, assumption of unprecedented, foolish, and harmful authority, are in themselves enough strongly to recommend his expulsion from the church. But this is not all. We have learned, and from an unexpected source, more of his history; become aware, indeed, of a curious imposture. If all these things prove true (and on your next journey bring us what proofs you have) it shall not be long before this curse is removed from the bosom of the priesthood; of which, indeed, it now seems he has never rightly been a member."

Having read it twice, carefully, he replaced it and locked the cabinet. Rage was boiling in him; the candle shook in his hand.

"And the journey has been made, and any day he may return," said he. "So she will

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drive me out at last—dog that I am. But the dog will rend once more. Patricio—Sofia—the child. I can not see them—their faces are all blurred—they do not live. It is she, she they represent. When they come to-morrow, it will be she; when they beg for the church's mercies I shall see only her! Ruined though I am, I will use the power once more. They have no money—let them beg it. They must pay—they must pay!”

\* \* \* \* \*

Durant, having gone out into the night, proceeded through the narrow streets toward the old adobe chapel. He picked his path in much abstraction through gloomy alleys; passed dark, projecting walls; crossing streets here and there with little tracks of light lying in them, products of dingy street lamps.

His whole nature had been stirred. Antagonism was unnatural to him, but his temperament was high-strung; he could be quick

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and intense, action having been decided on. At present he felt helpless. Existence was dark, like these streets, as silent and deserted. More than all else, he felt that he held still the fire of youth, was not the staid man his profession represented him to be.

He had just turned a silent corner into a narrow street, when he heard a child's voice in the distance behind him. Pausing, he could dimly see the form of a girl coming toward him into the dark, the short dress, the straggling hair. She was singing in a shrill little high voice; not an unpleasant voice. The song came gently into the night. She sang not loudly, absent-mindedly, but with a reckless fling to the words:

*"See! the white moon shines on high;  
Whiter is my true love's shroud,  
Whiter than the morning sky,  
Whiter than the evening cloud.  
My love is dead!"*

She stopped abruptly, her face within a

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few inches of Durant. She had not seen him until now. Even yet she could not recognize him in the gloom.

"Ramoncita!" he said.

"Oh!—Who is it, Señor?"

"Durant."

"Oh—the Padre! What, so late? You are a bad man.

She was the only being in the town with whom he felt at ease or acted freely.

"What about yourself, little girl?"

"Oh—" abruptly and as though it were not worth talking about; "I am out any time, Padre."

"Where this time?"

"Just around—for exercise."

The two stood in the gloom against the adobe wall.

"I know, Ramoncita—to see the baby."

"Padre, don't talk to me about that."

"You aren't losing faith in me, little girl? I can't spare you, you know."

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"You talk like a boy, now! You know I like you—mighty well. But I don't dare say anything. Mathilde, you know."

"I know. I am very sorry. I—I sometimes think about her; I would do anything to change her."

"Oh—Mathilde can take care of herself."

He could see in the gloom that she tilted her head to one side. Had it been day her look would have shown much archness. After a moment she put her small fingers on his arm and said with deep seriousness:

"Padre, you have a hard work in front of *you*, young man—yes, sir." She broke into a mirthful laugh. "Did you hear me sing—to keep myself company?"

"How did you learn such a song as that?"

"Mathilde."

"Oh, Mathilde."

"I didn't know English when I learned it. I don't know yet what it means; do you?"

"No. Go home. Go to bed. Good-bye!"

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She went up the street in the darkness.  
As he started away he heard the song again  
coming faintly:

*"Whiter than the morning sky,  
Whiter than the evening cloud.  
My love is dead!"*

## CHAPTER VI

**I**T had long been a custom of the poorer classes, unable to afford a funeral of greater pomp, to carry the dead to the church door, receive there the holy water from the bishop or a priest, and proceed thence to the burial ground.

The cathedral lifted its spire into morning light. The sunshine lay again over the bare marble and glinted in the polish of the high pillars. A breeze that had been in the mountains while it was yet dark and had felt the limbs of the pines and blown over mountain crags, came and wound itself among the bars of the wicket. The street as yet was very quiet, the yellow dust in it lying undisturbed. Some carts passed yonder in San Francisco Street; and somewhere beyond a burro brayed long and hoarsely.

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The breeze having found the wicket shut and each of the wicket bars fastened tight, came out into the street and lifted a handful of dust, threw it up and twirled it about; came back to the church again, slid up the stone walls and wantoned about the windows; looked in at the rows of empty seats stretching into the far gloom among the pillars, at the huge altar, and at the gilded figures; carelessly climbed on up the stone wall to the date in the rock; dusted the date a little; leaped to the roof, thence to the spire, and sailed lightly away.

Round the corner of the wall, fifty yards distant, standing near the cathedral's rear door, was the carriage of Madret. All day yesterday it had stood there, the horses harnessed to it and pawing the earth. No one had come in it, no one entered it. It was brought early from the stable, and returned late thither. A boy, curiously examining it, had come and looked through the glass

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door. He had seen a large basket within, from which peeped forth signs of a wine bottle, a napkin, evidences of food. It would seem the Father was ready to depart on a moment's notice, and that the notice had not come. Even at night, though the horses were unhitched, the harness remained on them. And here they were again to-day, pawing. It would still seem the Father was ready to go forth; but the hour of his departure was long in striking; the force that inspired that going forth was sluggish. Yet the carriage waited.

There came from opposite directions two figures to the door of the church. The girl, Ramoncita, walked to the wicket, took hold of the bars with her hands, and stared between them at the closed door. Antonio stood by the sidewalk, with one foot upon the first stone step. He was looking away into San Francisco Street. Ramoncita left the door and turned to him.

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"It makes you quiet, Antonio."

He gave a slight start.

"Ramoncita," he said after a pause, "Sofia has given in."

"What? How!"

"She can not bear the thought of the baby's not being saved. It was never baptized. Every fool knows the teaching of the Catholic church. Yet this beast, Madret, comes forth and claims a dispensation. He can yet save the baby. He sent a damned agent to the house this morning, to smirk and fawn. I say again, that man is no priest. But what can you expect—Sofia is half crazy. She listens to the promise that the sprinkling of the dead body will save the baby. Patricio is in bed with fever, raving. And so it goes. She will come and have the baby sprinkled. But—the money."

"What about the money, Antonio?"

"There's the devil of it," replied he.

She let her bright eyes wander over his

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face, in a sudden scrutiny. She tilted her head.

"But what do you care?" she asked.

"I? Nothing."

"Sofia, is it?"

"Yes, and everybody else—and the devil and the Lord knows what."

"I thought maybe you could get the money."

"I thought so, too, Ramoncita; but I'm afraid not. I've tried all morning—but—"

"How much is it?"

"Five dollars, and Patricio hasn't one to his name. Curse them, it seems that all his friends are falling away. Damn such a world. When it comes to money—where are the friends? From me, too, I can see them sneaking off like rats. When ruin once sets its will against a man, heaven nor earth nor luck can stop it."

"And Sofia gave in," murmured the girl.

"What else could she do? A woman of

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iron must have melted in the hell her mind is in. Her baby dead; her life ruined; strife and misery and poverty for months past; her husband in bed crazy with fever; her life's religion and the power of its beliefs weighing on her, till she sees her baby with the damned: this false hope held out. Bah!"—he turned away in disgust. "Who would be a woman?"

The girl shook her black hair and rubbed one shoe over the other. Her eyes were remarkably bright.

"Oh, well," she said; "Mathilde."

"Will Mathilde get the money?"

"Of course."

Antonio stood some time in silence, Ramoncita leaning her slender figure against the stones.

"Does she know the hour is changed?" asked Borrego.

"Changed?" Ramoncita looked up.

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"Yes. The business of the priest is pressing. The funeral must come quickly."

Ramoncita took a step out from the wall and stood with her hands on her hips. Her eyes flashed. There was a fine childish majesty in the indignant toss of her head. Yet, when she came closer to him, he thought she seemed a woman.

"They will be here in twenty minutes," said Antonio.

"What good will it do?" she cried.

"They can beg for it, I suppose," responded Antonio with a sigh. "*Dios!* There'll be a crowd here, you know."

She stood in thought, the sunlight bathing a form that was maturer than her years, yet that was slender, graceful, a statue of the wild, lovable Southwest.

"Antonio!" suddenly, and seizing his hand with spasmodic fervor. "Whatever comes—promise me—promise me—you will be a part of it; for Mathilde—for me!"

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"God, child! I'd follow a little girl like you—just to hear you sing."

"I'll find Mathilde. I'll bring the money. Come—" passionately—"let us swear friendship—to stand together. Patricio, Mathilde, Sofia—Ha! they are all crazy—they can not see! It depends on us, Antonio—you and me. If trouble comes, swear to me that we will go into it together!"

"I think it would be harder," said he, his eyes on her, "to keep out." He pressed her hot hand. "I promise."

Ramoncita turned suddenly about, walked briskly away, and disappeared almost in a run into San Francisco Street. She was going for her sister. Before the funeral procession arrived, she had warned Mathilde, returned, and was awaiting it.

There came another breeze after a time, and, dallying about, found Antonio still standing with one foot on the stone steps, and Ramoncita sitting in the sun. She had

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taken off her hat. It hung down motionless from one finger thrust out from the hand that rested on her knee. She was lost in thought, her eyes, wide, fixed on the earth of the street. Her face was colorless and strong, a child's face, yet something more. Ruggedness and natural daring were paradoxically shown by girlish lips. Possibilities of fierce action were suggested by her very stillness. The sunlight bathed her in yellow floods, as she sat alone on the steps and dreamed. The sunlight glistened on the loose masses of her locks, and lingered on her face, which, white and tender like those of the women of the north, yet touched with brown like the races of the south, was still, framed round by the curtain of her hair, the stern and melancholy countenance of the Indian.

There was a feeling in the breast of Antonio that he should be with Sofia. He had offered her his help, but she had insisted on

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walking alone. So he had wasted the hours seeking money.

"Patricio isn't able," she had said, "and I'll stand up and bear it myself." The wrinkle between the eyes had deepened as she said it.

A number of Mexicans came chattering along, straggling to the church. Still others followed. They prowled and strolled about, looking in at the windows, talking volubly; black-eyed, stupid-looking children clinging to ragged skirts; swarthy-faced men chewing tobacco and whittling. Antonio walked among them. He was in no talkative frame of mind. Certain ones cast toward him eyes expressing a sense of his superiority. There was something about this careless, handsome youth that was fascinating to homelier people. Antonio was a devil—oh yes, they all knew that; but he had a hold on them.

The pudgy Mr. Jimpse came out of San

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Francisco Street and approached slowly, red-faced.

"Aint it irregular, havin' it earlier?" he said to Antonio, wheezing.

Antonio assented.

"W'y—w'y—well, I reckon it is all right, ain't it Antonio? One time's as good as another?"

Mr. Jimpse sat down on the step and stared for five laboriously cogitative minutes. He seemed inwardly disturbed. The crowd gradually increasing, he got up, drew Antonio aside and whispered:

"It's—it's hurtin' me because somehow I do think it aint right. It's turrible fer me to say; but you got me to thinkin' sometimes maybe Madref aint jist like he ought. Antonio, you're makin' me rotten. I can't help it, honest. But say," he wheezed again and stretched painfully up toward Antonio's ear, "I'll feel better fer sayin' so to you; my conscience is hurtin' some."

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"Isn't it your stomach, Jimpse?" Antonio said.

"It aint all stomick, Antonio. There's some of it stomick, I know; but it aint all. I done better last night. I et jist one. But I done a little too much again this mornin'. Aint feelin' right—kind o' heavy—dull-like."

There were perhaps two hundred people in front of the church when the little funeral procession finally appeared. For all the affairs of Patricio Borrego aroused deep interest, even excitement. The small coffin, made of rough boards, was open to the day, so that the sun looked on the tiny form and the mountain breeze dipped in and fanned the face. There were white and black buntings and cloth of gaudier colors wrapped about the boards; the whole was supported on a light platform carried by two Mexicans, distant relatives of Sofia's. Sofia herself followed, walking very straight, her

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eyes on the ground, her face strained, the crease in the forehead and the drawn muscles of the mouth lending to her features something of that uncanny expression seen upon the faces of the nervously insane. But it was the strength and clearness of her mind that held her up.

There were very few others; some of the neighbors, the three old women, and the Mexican girl; several persons more or less distantly connected with the family; a few acquaintances of morbid dispositions, for the moment believing themselves also bereaved; and finally stragglers, who followed out of curiosity.

The coffin was placed before the still closed door, and several of the friends and neighbors began the rounds, begging for money. Sofia stood close beside the dead body of her child, staring vacantly at it, passing her thin hand over her eyes which did not move. Some minutes went by. She

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could hear the voices of the beggars. She saw the breeze lift one of the baby's scant locks, and noticed how the sunlight lay across its face. After a time she observed, too, that Antonio's tall form stood near her. It gave her a little sense of peace.

At last the beggars came forward. They were disappointed and whispering among themselves; they had not been able to obtain it all. The huge door of the cathedral was opened, the wicket pushed a little way aside, and the form of Madret, in his robes, appeared. He was told that they lacked a portion of the money.

They must beg again. He would not let them in.

The scornful eyes of the child, Ramoncita, swept the scene. She was unendurably exasperated by the absence of Mathilde. Why did she not come? What vile trick was that changing of the hour, leaving her sister scarce time to secure the money which should

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bring relief? Unable to wait longer, she darted away and disappeared once more in San Francisco Street.

Antonio saw her go. The scene assumed new meaning with her departure. It was more somber. The gloom of the hour was, to him, the gloom of Ramoncita. The day crystallized his thoughts, his feelings. Irrelevantly they centered round the girl. Some deep, slow undercurrent was beginning, in the hitherto purposeless, hollow life of Antonio, to sound forth, a voice in a cavern.

He came closer to Sofia and took her arm. She was now trembling as though from cold. The beggars went once more among the crowd and once more returned. Still they lacked a little. When she heard it, Sofia gasped and would have fallen, save for Antonio's arm about her. He could feel her swaying. If only Mathilde would come.

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Ramoncita, dashing away in search of her sister, the wretched scene still before her eyes, had not progressed two blocks in San Francisco Street before she suddenly met the staggering figure of a man. She halted and cried out. Immediately before her was the drawn and fear-inspiring face, the fever-haunted eyes, of Patricio Borrego. He had risen from his bed, dressed himself, and was coming on, the church his destination, his mind ridden by sickness, his purposes confused. She was young and thoughtless—she had the frankness of her youth. Her heart was full of sorrow for Sofia.

“Patricio!” cried she with fresh and heedless grief, “they will not let her in!”

Innocent cause of fierce disaster, she saw him spring past her, and followed, crying. Approaching the cathedral street, she beheld her sister running toward them.

A change had come over the scene at the church. After those few moments of blank

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silence, Sofia could bear no more. With a suppressed cry she sank to the stones, and, despite Antonio's arms, fell across the coffin.

Another priest than Madret beheld her fall. A carriage, its black-hooded top coated with the yellow dust of many prairies, its horses worn with long travel, was being driven to the church. From behind the driver, looked out with wonder on the crowd the bishop's face, strong, benign. He recognized Sofia and Antonio. He knew the history of the family; heard the beggars; guessed the meaning of the scene. A righteous wrath swept over his countenance, a countenance marked not more by age than by the stress of his long and patriarchal care for these, his children. He halted the carriage and dismounted. The crowd gave way before him. He strode, with the dignity of his anger and contempt, past the coffin. The cunning but cowardly visage of Madret

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stared at him, pallid, from the summit of the cathedral steps.

"Craven!" cried the bishop; and, by the very power of his presence, sent the offending priest back into the darkness of the church.

At the bidding of this new authority the coffin was brought to him, and the body sprinkled. The few coins collected were refused. Sofia had not recovered.

It was at this moment that Antonio heard a noise as of a rabble in the street beyond, voices, clamorings. He stood up and the sound suddenly increased. There turned from San Francisco Street toward the church the tall figure of his brother, followed by a crowd of astonished Mexicans, crying to him, trying to stop him. The man was fever-maddened. His face was wild; his eyes were shining.

Having barely time to understand that it was he, Antonio beheld Mathilde, followed by Ramoncita, running after him. With a

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quick spring the former was at Patricio's side, clinging to his arm, calling to him, dragging her weight upon him. The opposition only spurred him on. Like one mad he dragged her after him, cursing as he came, his face distorted; he flung her at length from him; darted through the dismayed crowd; bounded past his brother's outstretched arms; leaped like a panther on the bishop.

There were twenty hands to drag him back, but the time was too short. The weight of Patricio's great form hurled the bishop back within the vestibule, his fingers were on his throat, and with the other hand he had wrenched the head back, back with all the animal fury of his wild nature, until the neck was broken and the body of the churchman fell lifeless to the floor. Antonio, Mathilde and Ramoncita had rushed with the crowd to the wicket and were nearest the murderer. The eyes of the first saw





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only the dead body, and, over it, the flame-like face of Ramoncita. To him the crime meant more than the danger of his brother—it meant the danger of the girl. His promise to her, the new voice in his heart, the delirium of the moment, came all together and regenerated him. A purpose, towering, unselfish, flashed on him. He would impersonate his brother.

The plan suddenly born in the mind of Antonio was answered by Mathilde. Crowding Patricio over the body, into the gloom, back of the closed outer door, they pushed him toward the inner swinging one behind it. With the delay of barely a second, the murderer, in whom the spirit of flight had by now arisen, darted across the shaded vestibule and into the main body of the church; Mathilde followed and the door swung to behind them. The crowd now attempting to push in, Ramoncita threw her body against

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this exit as though to hide it and defy those who followed.

The bewilderment of the people, their awe of the church, the extreme rapidity of the action, aided the escape. It was as though Patricio and Mathilde had suddenly sunk through the solid stones. Seeing his brother safely on the other side, Antonio bent his head low, arose as though just from the body of the bishop, darted out headlong, and pierced the crowd.

He was dressed in much the same manner as was his brother, in dark clothes and wide sombrero. His form was the same, though slightly slenderer. In the haste of the moment, deceived by his flight, the crowd mistook the man and began pursuit. Several policemen joined the chase. The rabble, crying, dismayed, tore away after the flying figure of Antonio.

As he sprang on he knew that his life was committed to this tragedy. Free as he

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should be, in the law's sight, yet a new being was in him, a new life, a stern and powerful espousal of his brother's cause. They bayed behind him. His promise to the girl, the voice in the cavern, spurred him on. A mighty exultation, as he ran, surged within him. No more the life of indolence for him. The lion was aroused. No more the lack of purpose. Strange, dark joy, like the red light of a somber sunset, lit his heart. Ramoncita had drawn him in—Ramoncita had regenerated him forever.

Away from the central part of the city he ran; out among the straggling dwellings of the suburbs; over the stretch of sand a mile away across the ditches to the fort; up the heights of old Marcy, far above the city; over the ruined earthworks; into the hollow square that formed the summit. Crossing the hill's crown, he plunged down the farther side. It was then that his pursuers came leaping the first bulwark.

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He did not fear. He gloated over his promise to the girl; knew with prophetic knowledge the dangers of the time to come; rejoiced and sprang on. No more the listless seeking in the world. Ramoncita had regenerated him forever.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was not till three days after, when the deep misfortune of the hour had deepened, and the body of the bishop lay in state amidst the pillars of his own cathedral, that there were found, in a pocket of the clothing he had worn when death met him, papers proving a curious imposture of Madret's, and the already accomplished expulsion of that enormity from the sacred body of the church.

## CHAPTER VII

**D**URANT had spent a portion of the morning wandering aimlessly in the outskirts of the city. He was restless. He was intolerant of the expected event of the day. He could not attend to his own duties; he must walk. He would keep away from the center of the city until time for the procession to reach the church; then perhaps his curiosity or his deep indignation would draw him thither. He did not know of the change in the hour of the funeral.

He came at length toward the plaza. His face was paler than its wont. He thought it must be nearing the hour for the procession. Coming to the lower end of San Francisco Street he saw the crowd following Patricio at the upper end, heard the noise, and observed the general wonder of the few people about. The clamor put him imme-

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diately upon the alert; he ran toward the cathedral. The distance was great. When he at last came into the intersecting street and came to the church, the bishop was dead, Antonio had taken flight, and the crowd had pursued.

Durant found Ramoncita sitting on the stones beside the coffin, her small shoulders bent over, with the hair hanging about them. Sofia still lay unconscious beside her.

There were yet a few stragglers about, looking at them curiously, not knowing what to do. The authorities were taking charge of the bishop, whose body was presently carried away. Mr. Jimpse, alone of the stragglers, hovered close to Sofia. He crossed his hands helplessly, moved uneasily from one side of the coffin to the other, red of face, bewildered. He seemed to bear an uncomfortable idea that he must act, with no method of procedure presenting itself. His countenance wore mingled suggestions of

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terror, pain, and weak realization of responsibility.

"Pore women, pore women!" he mumbled. "Turrible! Ought to do somethin'; musn't lie here. Er—say, girl! W'y—mustn't lie here! Ought to do somethin'."

From those about, Durant soon learned what had happened. He ran to the girl and laid his hand on her arm.

"Ramoncita!" he called in a low voice.

She looked up quickly into his face. His lips were drawn tight. There was infinite pity in his eyes. The girl was on her feet immediately. There was something half-savage in the expression of her face. The hair was shaken back from the flushed cheeks.

"Oh Señor!" she cried, seizing his hands. "If you had been here—if you had only been here!" She was ready for action at once.

"We must get her away," he replied quickly. "I will bring help."

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He turned about and confronted Jimpse, who was phlegmatically steering closer.

"I'll—I'll do most anything," volunteered Jimpse.

"He will, Padre," cried the eager Ramoncita, "he will, I know. Jimpse is good. Take him, Señor. O Mathilde! Mathilde! And Patricio and all of us! Shall we all be killed?"

"Hush child—surely you are not afraid."

Durant was lifting Sofia.

"Afraid!" abruptly, with a sudden defiant toss of her head. "No."

By this time policemen would have helped them, but Durant would accept no further assistance. With much labor on the part of them both, and infinite difficulty in the case of Jimpse, difficulty displaying itself in many wheezings, gruntings, self-condemning murmurs, and pained distortion of features, the two men lifted Sofia at last into a car-

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riage which Ramoncita managed to summon. The coffin was borne in after her. There was room for but one other, and, being urged by the priest, Mr. Jimpse, suppressing his terror, seated himself beside Sofia. The latter was now reviving, but still unable to support herself, so that Jimpse must hold her.

"We shall come at once," said Durant.  
"Take her home."

He covered the tiny coffin with his cassock. The carriage door was closed; and through the glass they caught a last glimpse of Sofia's deathlike face and Jimpse's red one close beside it. The horses started, the carriage rolled away with the dust swirling behind; and the ceremonies at the church were over.

The street was now deserted. Durant turned to Ramoncita. He could have cried out. His face felt strangely stiff. The girl

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was perfectly quiet. He was struck, almost awed, by the calmness of the countenance as she turned her head to one side in a bird-like way she had, and looked up at him with sharp eyes.

"Señor!" she said.

"Yes, child. What is it? Let us go."

"No—not at once. Padre, I think Antonio will be here; I think he is coming now. Let us wait. Mr. Jimpse is good, only queer; he will do everything. We will go presently. Let us wait for Antonio."

"But where are the others, Ramoncita—Patricio and Mathilde?"

Antonio had allowed himself to be caught beyond the fort. The trick had been discovered. The crowd was returning in the distance. The priest and the girl stood in the dust of the street, the former without his cassock, Ramoncita hatless. At his words she turned an intense look on his face.

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There were animal instinct and adult intelligence in the gaze.

"You would help a murderer?" she said in a low voice.

"By the grace of heaven," he cried suddenly, carried away by emotion and trusting the child, "it is no murder!"

He felt powerfully drawn to her. He turned and saw the half-open wicket of the church, the spot where the bishop's body had fallen. Something of the scene that must have been enacted there passed swiftly through his brain. A woman's figure which, to him, the center of the scene, fastened the pain of his thoughts. He turned again and saw the few ragged stragglers, and, in the distance, the approaching crowd. He was suddenly wild. His nature had waited long for this revulsion. The very light of the sun was little less than mockery. The life his hopes and his purposes had built about him was crumbling in some strange

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decay. Hate—hate for all that he had been or was, burned him. Some fierce power gripped his heart and wrenched him in one moment out of his past and into the recklessness of his future, a power which had worked in him long, unknown, subtle and invincible. He clenched his hands. He could have rushed raving at the stones of the cathedral, crying her name.

Ramoncita was looking at him. Show her all? Trust it to her? He would not be shut away. He knew her for the only link between himself and Patricio and Mathilde. Show her his daring! He had come to the dividing line—war without or damnation within. Ramoncita's eyes seemed to read his mind. He seized her hand. The decision was made. He spoke quickly and in whispers.

"Ramoncita—trust me! I, too, am not afraid. There may be war in this, long and desperate. I am on your side—reconcile

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them all to me! Else it will kill me. I might help him—and your sister. You understand!”

She gave the toss of the head and looked squarely into his eyes, saying:

“I knew it! Señor, you are magnificent. Trust me, too. Only—I am sorry; don’t think so much of—of her, Señor. I am afraid!”

The crowd came on, briskly, confusedly, some running. The tall, brown-faced Antonio walked haughtily in the midst of it. As they approached Durant and the girl, the two separated. Antonio was watching them.

The news of the murder was spreading through the city, producing a profound sensation. People were gathering to look curiously at the spot where the deed had been committed. In every part of the town there was but the one topic of conversation. Men stood in knots together talking in low voices, conjecturing the result, the full de-

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tails, the present hiding place of the murderer. Officers were scouring the neighboring streets. They came now fruitlessly to search the church.

There was deep indignation expressed, yet, here where murders were not uncommon, much coolness. Underneath the outward expression there might have been detected here and there some faint signs of approval. In certain parts of the city, among those who had been followers of Patricio, there was an undercurrent of savage gratification. The populace seemed to realize that there was more in this than ordinary murder, that the principles involved themselves. Yet in nearly all classes, terror at the sacrilegious daring of the deed was the predominant emotion, an emotion showing itself in much feverish crossing of breasts and muttering of prayers. For the bishop had been dearly beloved. Antonio was arrested and taken before a magistrate. There was some doubt

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why he should be arrested, and much discussion; but the thing was finally done. Ramoncita hastened again to Durant.

"Padre," said she slowly, a little flush about her temples. It occurred to him that her manner was timid.

"We must follow—" She faltered. She was looking down and tapping a restless foot. "We must go. One of us must follow Sofia—the other, Antonio."

"Go, then, you, to Sofia. I shall see the trial."

She hesitated. Her heart was fluttering. She still looked down.

"N-no," she half-whispered, mournfully, her mouth drooping. Then she cried—"Oh! I don't know!"

A new thought came to him.

"You, then," said he gently, "follow Antonio."

She turned slowly about and moved away, a look of longing on her face.

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"No. No—I have decided. Sofia needs a woman."

"You will not follow him?"

She walked on slowly away from Durant.

"No—no. I could not. I do not want to. I want to go to Sofia."

Before he moved away she turned in the street and called softly:

"Good-bye."

And she waved a mournful little hand at him droopingly.

There was no definite charge against Antonio. In a formless way the officers tried to intimate that he might have had something to do with the murder. Many friends testified that he had endeavored to prevent it. It was said that he had aided the escape. Confronted with this charge Antonio deemed it wisest to acknowledge an imaginary cowardice in himself. He stood up and, in a clear voice, with majestic yet ever-careless manner, defended himself. He had realized

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the meaning of the deed, he said; that the crowd might be enraged, that he had been known to be always associated with Patricio; had suddenly feared the wrath of the community might break out against the family; and, fearing this, had fled.

"The people," he said, waving his hand imperiously, "are hard to judge. Look at them now, your honor; even now they are feverishly on all sides of the question. I was afraid and—*Dios!* ran away!"

When he said it he looked little as though he had ever known fear, gazing about coolly upon the confused mob that filled the little court room. Everybody admired Antonio—the magistrate himself came under the power of his graceful presence. Antonio was set at liberty.

In the latter part of the afternoon Durant entered Patricio's dwelling. He found Sofia, Ramoncita, and Jimpse. Sofia was recovering, but still distracted. At times

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she arose and walked about, but Ramoncita made her lie down and comforted her. She was moaning and calling for Patricio, and pitifully declaring that if her husband went to hell, she would go too. Leaving the half-crazed mother in care of the three old neighbor women and the girl, Durant, Jimpse and Ramoncita went away with the little coffin.

In a neglected corner of the paupers' cemetery, where the sands stretched far to the west and the breezes from the mountains came again and blew about it, they set the tiny box upon the ground. Ramoncita looking at the grave, Jimpse mournfully crossing himself, they buried the child and heaped the earth above it.

## CHAPTER VIII

**A**T seven o'clock that evening Durant was summoned once more to the building behind the cathedral.

The light from the red shade lay over the ceiling; the red of it ceased half way down the face of Madret as he sat by the table, giving place to the yellowish white from beneath the shade, upon the blue-black of his chin. Durant stood looking at the older priest. There was a restlessness on Madret's face which the other could not interpret, something almost of fever in the eyes. But he was immovable.

"There is but one thing to do," he said abruptly.

Durant waited.

"Do you like war, Durant?" The thin lips performed the smile.

"Make haste," said Durant.

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"What do you propose?"

"Are there, then, no others whose business it is to propose?" Durant was pressing his fingers upon the table, bending them back.

"The sheriff and his men are not enough," replied Madret.

Durant said nothing to this.

"I knew a war once," continued the other; "fanatics in that, too. There were three of them at first; there were a hundred at the end, and blood enough."

He leaned back in his chair. It seemed to Durant, as he watched, that the lines about the mouth were haggardness. Madret's shadow loomed large and formless on the white wall behind him.

"The sheriff and a few deputies are not sufficient. Why trust it, Durant, to disinterested ones? One can not gauge the minds of any but Catholics. We ourselves shall follow."

"Whom, and where?" said Durant.

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"The murderers, of course."

Durant spread all of the fingers of one hand upon the table, seeing the veins in the yellow lamplight. For a moment he did not reply.

"Why," he asked presently, speaking without expression and slowly, "why do you use the plural?"

Madret was suddenly leaning over the table again, the line of the shade's red light falling across his eyes. The lips were restless. Not looking at Durant, he answered:

"Every one knows there were two that escaped."

"And how do they know?"

It was Madret's fingers which moved now. They were twining themselves together. His eyes shifted only a second to Durant's. He did not reply. Durant felt that he was in some repressed battle.

"She is with him," said Madret.

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Durant stared long straight at the man before him.

"Who?" he asked at last, knowing who.

Yet again the smile came over Madret's face, sinuously.

"The she-devil," he replied.

Some of the muscles that might have lifted Durant's fist contracted. The fist lay still on the table.

"For many months," said Madret, "there has been the curse—the she-devil. The city a quicksand. Living a danger. Hate and treachery before, behind. We will break the mainspring." He watched always the eyes, now, of Durant. His own were hollow.

"You will come?" inquired he.

"Where?"

"I think—I do not know—but I think to one of the mountain passes. It is what Borrego would have done months ago, had I not crushed him. He has longed to fight it out. He had followers even then, but not

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enough. How it is now, I do not know. Perhaps it was arranged and they are ready."

Intense silence for a time.

"Do you like war, Durant?"

No reply from Durant.

"I can raise fifty out of the church."

"Have we not mobs enough?" broke in the other.

"And you—how many could you raise, Durant?"

The two men looked long at each other.

"It may seem a little wild," continued Madret, "but I know best."

"Priests should not fight," said Durant, with a smile of his own, strange and cynical.

"Only lead," was the response, "and bless. The arm of the Lord present in the flesh. Concentrating of religious zeal. A little tent in the rocks. Any small thing should be directed as though it were a big thing. Make it war, Durant—a holy war. The plan was laid to hold the pass, long ago. How great

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the movement is now, who knows? Fanatics! How many could you raise, Durant?"

"How do you know the girl is with him?" asked Durant, much of hardness, something of fierceness, in his voice.

Madret's hands clutched each other. The lines about the mouth were even more clearly haggardness.

"I know enough of her," he said. "Come."

"Are you not leisurely, for war, Father Madret?"

"It is being prepared while I talk to you. And they will wait."

"You know much."

Madret cast his eyes quickly at Durant.

"And would teach some of it to you," he said shortly. "Will you come?"

"I will raise no mob for the pursuit of Patricio Borrego; no."

"But the she-devil," half whispered he who sat by the table. "Durant, now is the time. The church has been throttled all too

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long. Now at last you and I together will drag her to the earth."

The nerves in Durant's forehead seemed suddenly drawn into a knot. His mouth was dry. Madret looked somehow old.

"You and I together," was repeated.

"I know you," said the younger man at last, in a voice that sounded strange even to himself, "for what I long ago guessed you—a persecutor. This is the first of the last, and I am satisfied. I am free. Understand me—I am against you, body and soul. I take this last opportunity of calling you, priest of God as you feign to be, the most damnable villain I am cursed with knowing!"

The red light found but one man now—Madret. Having looked long at the door through which Durant had gone, he dropped his eyes to his sickly fingers on the table, and gazed at them. Finally, as though he

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lost control of his muscles, his head fell upon his hands.

There was a knocking at the door, but he did not hear. There was yet another knocking, louder than before, and the door opened. The sheriff came in. He wore a long, red beard. He bristled all over with his own importance.

"I haven't been able to prove it," he said loudly and with no ceremony. Madret raised his head.

"Prove what?" he asked.

"That they went to the pass."

"Damnation!" cried Madret, rising in a fury; "must you prove by algebra that a man is shot before you lift him up? You haven't proved it! Then leave it unproved. Blockheads, blind idiots! We must risk it, that is all; risk it!"

The sheriff's countenance showed some wonder, even some suspicion.

"Your carriage," he said after a pause,

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during which Madret walked nervously about, "which stood at the cathedral for you this morning, is not in the stable."

Madret only muttered.

"Where is it?" asked the sheriff.

"It is your business to learn!" replied the priest harshly. "Is it a clue? Then take it up. Put your algebra on that."

The sheriff stood and watched him in silence. He saw only that Madret moved to and fro, that his lips relaxed and contracted across his teeth, that his fingers were nervously intertwined.

"Escapes—confusion," said the sheriff, and turned and went out.

When he had gone Madret collapsed. He half sat, half fell in a chair, stretched his arms across the table and dropped his head once more.

\* \* \* \* \*

Walking restlessly about in the less frequented quarters of the town in order that

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his passion might subside, Durant came upon Antonio and Ramoncita. The two were hurrying along the silent street toward Ramoncita's home. It was now almost dark. A poor light on the opposite side of the street cast some rays across. By them Durant recognized the two and caught glimpses of a haughty anger that lit up Ramoncita's face.

"Oh! the Padre!" she cried, stopping him.

"Yes," replied Durant.

He scarcely knew what to say. He had never known Antonio; the Mexican might be excused for distrusting him. He hoped now at once to cast their fortunes together in the struggle which he felt approaching. His hesitation was to no purpose. Ramoncita immediately paved the way.

"Now Antonio; here," she said, speaking with caution, but being unable to rid herself of a certain air of offended dignity which sat oddly upon her. It only added another ele-

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ment to the never-absent charm of her manner. "Here now. This is the Padre. I have told you all about him. *I, Antonio, I* say that he is magnificent."

"You see she is angry with me," observed Antonio. "As for what she says, of course—you see—you couldn't expect me to understand it." He was speaking hurriedly and watching the street. There were only old adobe buildings about, all dark, their occupants gone to the plaza to hear news of the murder. "You have always seemed to me different. Your face, Señor, is not any coward's face; but—"

"But you think I would be on Madret's side—of course. But I am not. This night, this hour, I have made the breach."

"Didn't I tell you!" cried Ramoncita, impatient of the delay, taking it very much as a matter of course that priests should go desperately to the assistance of murderers.

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"Hurry up, Antonio! Tell him what is in the note, quick!"

Yet Antonio hesitated, standing still, silently weighing in his mind the possibilities.

"Go on!" cried Ramoncita. "I tell you he is everything big—bigger words than there are." She had long ago given all her faith to Durant, given it to him the first time he talked to her.

Antonio took the priest's arm and led him across the street under the lamp. There he stood and looked meditatively into the other's eyes for some seconds.

"She's right," he said.

And the thing was done.

He handed to Durant a folded paper. On the outside was written:

*"Ramoncita, give this to Antonio at once."*

The priest read:

*"Antonio: We have gone to the Drexel Pass. We will hide there till you come, when we will get*

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*him away to Mexico, or fight it out if they follow. Come at once. I know what I say when I tell you that this will be the beginning of deadly persecution for us all. Let Jimpe take care of Ramoncita.*

*"M."*

"She found it under the pillow of her bed," observed Antonio. "The trail leads past the house. I haven't told Ramoncita what it says, for the reckless child would follow us. I know her too well, and it wouldn't do."

Durant shuddered at the thought.

"No," he said, "don't tell her."

"At least, not that Mathilde is with him. The sheriffs and the priests are not the only ones at work. If they get the clue to the direction, and they are sure to get it before long, a mob will be after us. But—" he leaned over and whispered—"I have found a few desperate, trusty fellows; ten of them—Ortiz, Marino, Salazar, and seven others; and, thanks to Ramoncita, here are you."

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"Here am I indeed," said Durant, seizing the other's hand.

"We shall be ready to follow in two hours—not before. It is almost impossible to get horses."

They returned to Ramoncita, who had been waiting, and the three proceeded on their way.

"Now, Señor," she said quickly as they hurried along, "I have done it all for you; you will do a thing for me, won't you now? Please!" clinging to Durant's arm. "Tell me what it is—tell me! And Mathilde!"

Durant stopped at a corner where they were to leave her.

"Go home, Ramoncita; go to bed and sleep. I think it is best."

She thought a moment, and, either seeing that her appeal was useless, or agreeing that to go was best, she determined to obey.

She stepped for an instant to Antonio. All her petulance, her childishness, were gone.

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She took his hand, frankly, tenderly. She looked up in his face, and he saw the glint of a tear, though she smiled. He restrained a passionate impulse to take her in his arms. She said no more, only fastened her eyes on him, so that they stood a moment thus, looking at each other. Then she gave her hand to Durant, demurely, and departed.

Durant moved on. Antonio paused. He turned in the gloom and moved a few steps back, in the direction in which she had gone. He could barely see her, a wraith, yonder going from him. He halted suddenly, and returned. When he had almost overtaken Durant, he stopped once again and looked behind. The wraith had disappeared. He joined the priest.

## CHAPTER IX

**R**AMONCITA walked slowly to her home. The burro was standing stolidly at the front of the house, and she hung about his neck a moment and let him flap his great ears against her face. She led him, then, to his enclosure at the rear, came again to the front, and entered the house.

Lighting a lamp she stared about a little at the scant furniture. She had no thought of fear, scarcely of loneliness. She had been too untamed always for that, and had spent too many hours alone. She almost wished she had opened the note before taking it to Antonio. Her blood was hot as she thought that they did not trust her; as though she were not as daring as they! Yet,—no, were it to do again she would not open the note.

For several minutes she sat silent with

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her feet doubled up under her on the seat of a chair, staring at the flame of the light and wondering where they were. It was quiet without. Finding no satisfaction in this, it occurred to her to go to bed as Durant had told her to do. She had been up late the night before. She was tired; though her eyes, seeming black in the lamplight, were extremely wide open. There was nothing to be gained by remaining awake; she would go to sleep and so pass the time until Mathilde should come and her intense eagerness to know might be satisfied.

Having drawn down all the faded curtains, she went into the darkness of the rear room and assured herself that the door was locked. Returning she pondered, standing dreamily in the middle of the floor, as to whether she should bar the front one. She decided not to do so; Mathilde might return, and she was not afraid. She went to the foot of the bed and took off the dress and

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the ragged stockings and shoes, all very dusty, and piled them on the floor. She put on a long white gown which Mathilde had made for her, turned down the covers of the bed, and came to the light. The black, tangled hair, hanging thick about her shoulders, fell upon the white of the gown. In the midst of it and above the white, the brown paleness of her face was lit with spots of red upon the cheeks and temples. Here was the beauty of the savage and the beauty of the child. She stopped her hand in the act of turning down the light. No; she would leave it for Mathilde. She climbed into bed, drew the covers over her, and presently, after more wide-eyed staring at the flame of the lamp and listening to the intense silence without, she wept.

This was the weeping of the woman. The elements that mingled in this girl were strange and contradictory. The woman was new, growing. The weeping was but brief,

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nor was it nervous tension alone that caused it. A new thing was expanding in her heart. Hardy must it be to grow and thrive, tended by her latent savagery; else the rocks of her unusual way might choke, or wither it. Marvelous would it be, a thing of supernatural beauty, if, battling against the rudeness of its circumstances, it yet should live. Soon she fell asleep.

It was now past eight o'clock and dark outside. After some further minutes of silence, there was a soft step without the door. Silence again, and then another step. Some one tried the latch very carefully, and timidly stopped again. Some one tried the latch a second time, and pushed gently on the door. It opened the infinitesimal fragment of an inch and stood so for fully a minute. The minute having passed, the door opened other fragments of the inch. The person without could surely see the bed.

The sound of wheezy breathing came

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through the door, that kind of breathing which one makes very loud in the erroneous belief that he is keeping himself quiet. The door opening farther, there appeared very plainly the dull, phlegmatic eye of Mr. Jimpse. After a long time of staring at the bed, he came in as quietly as he could and shut the door. Then he stood many minutes more, somewhat bewildered it would seem, and watched the head upon the pillow. Ramoncita was dreaming, troubled and tossing. After a time Mr. Jimpse, moving heavily to prevent the squeaking of his shoes and stepping very awkwardly, drew a chair to the light and laboriously sat himself down with his face to the girl.

He was following Antonio's instructions. The latter had showed him Mathilde's note, informed him fully of the condition of affairs, and besought him to go and watch over Ramoncita. Mr. Jimpse had never done any such thing before; he had been somewhat

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frightened by the proposition. He had an affection for Ramoncita and saw that she ought to be cared for. But, really, he felt he did not know how. It was all extremely hazy to Mr. Jimpse. The heavy, enervating responsibility of having in some vague way to take care of a girl of fifteen sat upon him. He had therefore come carefully to the house, and opened the door with extreme caution. It was like a mist lifting from the plain, or the weight of an oppressive dream from the mind, when he found her asleep. An honest sigh of relief escaped him as he sat down. Providence had done it for him; thank the blessed saints she was already taken care of.

He folded his hands. Ah—it was all right; he was sure he knew how to sit there and look at her.

There was one other thing that troubled Mr. Jimpse. He had had nothing to eat since noon, and hardly anything then. The

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irregular events of the day, and the hurried orders of Antonio in the evening, had made it impossible for him to take his customary nourishment. He could not recall any other day of the kind. His hunger was painful, sickening. He could feel it in his stomach like a plate of thin, irregular metal spread over the bottom of it.

Suddenly and with no warning Ramoncita awoke. Mr. Jimpse was startled to see her eyes staring wide and shining directly at him. He colored deeply and looked ashamed and grieved, saying nothing. Ramoncita stared one long minute. Then she sat up straight with her hands behind her on the pillow. The neck of the night-gown was unfastened, displaying the small round throat. Another minute she looked in deep surprise. Mr. Jimpse, like a culprit, gazed painfully at her.

"Mr. Jimpse!" she cried.

Jimpse started again as though some one

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had slapped him on the back, and settled into even more phlegmatic silence.

"Why, what in the world are you doing here?" demanded she.

Jimpse moved uneasily.

"Oh," he said miserably, "*I don't know.*"

Ramoncita broke into a shrill, prolonged laugh. She ceased abruptly and crawled to the edge of the bed, watching Jimpse in intense meditation.

"Where have you been?" she said.

"Antonio," said Jimpse.

"He sent you?"

"Yes."

"Take care of me, was it?"

"Oh—yes."

"Hm!" with much contempt.

She said no more for a minute, thinking.

"Mr. Jimpse," she asked presently, looking at him steadily, "is Antonio going?"

Jimpse squirmed a little.

"Er—yes—yes, he's going."

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"Where?" she eagerly demanded.

"I aint to tell," said Jimpse frankly.

She saw that it could not be done in that way, and began to talk volubly.

"Terrible thing, wasn't it, Jimpse? Terrible. And you were good. I think you're splendid, Jimpse! I don't know what in the world we could have done, the Padre and I, if it hadn't been for you. And all day, too, and you helped so well. Poor Sofia! Mr. Jimpse, aren't you tired? You needn't sit up—lie down on the floor! I'm all right; hm! needn't watch me. Aren't you terribly tired?"

"No—not exactly—that is,—well, no—not *tired*."

She leaned far forward, stretched her neck and whispered tragically.

"You aren't *hungry*, are you, Mr. Jimpse?"

It all came out; he could not bear it any longer.

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"Turrible,—turrible!" he said huskily.  
"W'y—w'y—I aint had but one slice o'  
bread since early mornin'; honest!"

Ramoncita wrinkled up her forehead and  
whistled in vast astonishment.

"I'm plumb miserable!" ejaculated  
Jimpse.

"But isn't your head clearer—feel better  
—not eating, you know? You always said  
so."

"But not like this—Lord! I find it's jist  
as bad and dampenin' on the mind to go  
without, as to have too much. It's worse, a  
dern sight worse!"

Ramoncita rubbed her chin carefully with  
her small fingers, staring at Jimpse. Then  
she stepped down upon the floor and float-  
ed away into the rear room like a white  
cloud, calling after her:

"You just wait, Mr. Jimpse."

A sluggish fire—possibly it should be

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called merely the gray-blue smoke of a sluggish fire—lit up Jimpse's eyes.

When Ramoncita returned she bore a saucer upon which was one small slice of bread. She hid behind his chair, laughter in her eyes, and came no more before him. She thrust the bread close to his face. She was now again the child. She seemed, as she talked to Jimpse, like a slim little girl of twelve, nymph-like. The pure and unthinking innocence of extreme youth graced her actions.

"There now," she cried in a motherly tone, nodding her head up and down, "you shan't go hungry any longer!"

Jimpse's heart fell as he observed the size of the slice, but he lost no time in eating it, Ramoncita chattering from her hiding place behind him.

"Good of you, Mr. Jimpse, to come. I might have been lonesome you know, if I had wakened up. And to come hungry too! Ma-

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thilde makes *such* good bread. Oh!—she can cook the most delicious things! Pies? Oh!—and the juiciest, sweetest steak! Why—wasn't it enough? Of course not! I didn't think. A man that hasn't eaten since morning! Well, we weren't ready for to-morrow, you know, and maybe there isn't very much; but I can get you—some more."

She took the saucer, Jimpse eagerly watching it disappear round his chair.

"Oh—a—Mr. Jimpse,—why can't you tell me where Antonio is going?"

The one slice of bread had only made it worse for Mr. Jimpse.

"It's too far, fer you," he said; "you'd git killed in the rocks."

The girl was alert on the instant. She brought one more slice of bread with yellow butter on it, and stood again behind him.

"The mountains *are* bad, Mr. Jimpse. I'm so afraid for Mathilde!" Both the mountains and Mathilde were guesses. She

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watched Jimpse closely as he devoured the bread.

"Yes—bad for a woman," said he, thinking of the brevity of this harvest of butter.

She chattered again volubly, Jimpse hoping with all his powers of hope that she would not think it enough.

"Oh, I know!" cried the girl suddenly. "Jimpse," she leaned with her face close to him, "there's a pie!"

Jimpse gulped audibly.

Laughing, she ran away, and returned with the pie and a knife. She set the plate on a table behind him, and cut the pieces. Presently her white arm appeared, showing him the pastry, from which he, rapt, perceived juice running. He took a piece, and muttered blindly as he saw the arm, the plate, the rest of the feast, disappear.

"Oh—a—I was afraid," she chattered, Jimpse gorging, "I was afraid at first that Patricio would be foolish enough to try to

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get to Lamy. But the pass is so much better. Oh! I hope, I hope he can get away!"

She was holding forward another piece, just ready to place it in his hand, but hesitated, watching him.

"Yes—yes," he said desperately, reaching toward the dripping pastry, "pass much better!"

She thrust it into his hands, her eyes lit now with triumphant light, the blood beating in her veins. There was yet another step. The mountains held two well-known passes thereabouts. Which one was it? Her active mind decided upon the Drexel Pass at once, for it was the narrower, more lofty, and in these times more deserted. She had been over it once and across the mountains, to some friends of Patricio's who lived upon the other side. She cut away at the pie and chattered and spread the juice about, cramming piece after piece into Jimpse's hand, laughing recklessly, and tossing her head.

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"Here's the biggest one of all!" she cried, "and the reddest and the juiciest! And here's to Patricio, and the saints help him over the Drexel Pass!"

"The saints," echoed Jimpse, beside himself with the sweet titillation of his stomach, seizing the last piece from the hand that was stretched above his shoulder, "the saints help him over the Drexel Pass!"

His back was also toward her clothing, and she moved away from him, nearer the wall, talking breathlessly all the while.

"I think there's another one, Jimpse. I know she baked two. Oh, Mathilde is the best cook that there is. One day she made—"

All the soft garments that would fall without noise went flying through the door into the rear room. Jimpse was nearing the last bite.

"—she made a new kind. She mixed up apricots, peaches, and plums, and—"

She was reaching stealthily for her hat,

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which hung upon the wall. She secured it and sailed it through the door.

"and—oh! everything! And it was the *juiciest* thing, Mr. Jimpse; you just couldn't get it to your mouth. It was *just the very juiciest thing* that anybody ever heard of. And when I had finished my piece—"

She had seized the small shoes and was gliding into the rear room.

"—my dress was all spoiled. I was little then, Mr. Jimpse," calling in from the other room, now,—“a little bit of a girl; and I had the juice in my hair, and Mathilde declared she would never, never make another—”

The dress was going over the head.

"—make another such a queer, peculiar pie as long as she lived. And she never did. You wait a minute and I'll bring in the other one. I know very well it's here, for she made two!"

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She was pulling on the shoes, her fingers moving like quick points of light.

"Oh, here it is!" she cried; "and bigger, and a whole lot juicier than that other pie. Wait till I get another plate."

The last buttons were being fastened and she was picking up her hat.

"I know you haven't half enough yet, Mr. Jimpse, not half enough!"

"I aint had *quite* enough, I know," said Jimpse dubiously, sitting stolidly by the light with his back to the door. "Cause I can tell how it feels. You see I made a study o' the feelin' o' my stomick, Ramoncita, and I usually tell. Only thing is not to let it git away with me. Now you mustn't let me eat more 'n half the other one, girl—jist about half. I can tell by the feelin' that that's the amount. But I'd go on, you know, hungry; only jist by gaugin' it that way. When I'm careful and eat only moderate it's like a different kind o' sky and air, some-

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how; I'm 'nother man. But when I eat too much, Ramoncita, I feel like I was heavy, somehow—not clear in the—”

But Ramoncita closed the outer door behind her.

The night was cool and clear and starlit. The streets still seemed very quiet. She hastened to the rear enclosure and found the burro standing with his face against the shed, wagging his ears serenely. In much haste she sought the small bridle, then the saddle, and drew the girths tight. Glancing furtively at the door she led the burro out, closed the gate, and mounted. She was small and her steed was poor, but there was iron purpose in her heart.

Almost at once she came to the wide, bare prairie that stretched its mighty waste flat under the stars to the distant mountains. The night air blew her hair across her face. The burro started on his long, long mincing

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trot over the sands; and Ramoncita was on her way.

As she went she sang a little to herself, sadly, quietly, and yet with some of the daring in the words, tossing the hair from her face and staring at the dim and distant mountain line:

*"See! the white moon shines on high;  
Whiter is my true love's shroud—"*

And the white moon came up indeed, rather yellow than white, and hung a brazen shield against the east, casting the twinkling shadows of the burro's feet upon the sand. She was thinking of Mathilde, and of Patricio and Sofia. She did not turn to see the glow the city cast upon the sky, nor wonder whether she should ever watch those blinking lights again.

*"Whiter than the morning sky,  
Whiter than the evening cloud.  
My love is dead!"*

## CHAPTER X

**T**HERE were whispers of something new about the plaza that night. The trees that swayed in the breeze and flecked the light of the street lamps with shadow, seemed to know it, whispering it among themselves. The dark, adobe walls of the governor's long palace frowned it across the open space to the opposite shops, and they in turn blinked it back to the governor's palace. The money drawers of the shops must have known it, for they were kept shut, the customary dribs failing to be doled out, nobody being in a mood to buy. The salesmen knew it very well indeed and stood as far out in front as conscience would allow, staring with all eyes widely about the plaza, walking over to other salesmen and talking in deep interest. The drinking-fountains in the plaza must have considered

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it a holiday, for there were many thirsty throats. The stone hero in the center alone remained unconscious, looking out blankly, confident of his dead stone weapon.

Under the hero's feet were knots of men. Behind him were others. A short distance away on any side, still there were little knots of men; and yonder in darker corners among the trees. Had the drinking-fountains been provided with ears instead of with mouths alone, they might have known it was no gala-night. The figures about were too quiet, talking too cautiously among themselves. It was being told, and made much larger in the telling, that Antonio Borrego was gathering men together. The ten whom Antonio had really gathered, had grown into a hundred in the repeating of it. The populace wondered who they were, what they were doing—why—why. People looked curiously and suspiciously at one another. Was it now

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that the hidden undercurrent they had felt so long was coming to the surface?

No doubt there were many things unguessed. If Antonio was gathering men together, how deeply, then, was Antonio concerned? If Antonio was concerned so deeply now, had he not been concerned before the deed was done? It all seemed plain. The plot was hatched and elaborately matured, no doubt, long ago. The murder, then, was but the spark from the flint. There might be a general, a terrible uprising. They had imagined it at times before. The saints look to the people now! Cross yourself, brother, and pray to the Virgin Mary. The wolves are loose.

There was a sudden hush among the knots of men. Where heads were close together, they drew apart and found the faces about them turned toward San Francisco Street. Following this general gaze men saw Antonio himself, walking erect, careless, very

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much as they had seen Antonio walk every day and every night for many a month, along the street in front of the lighted windows of the shops. He heeded no knots of men in the plaza, cared not a snap of his strong fingers for the whispers that were floating in the air. He was alone and attending strictly to the affairs of Antonio Borrego. Not stopping, he passed on, away from the plaza, into the narrow congestion of lower San Francisco Street, and disappeared in the gloom.

The talking in the plaza was more suppressed and more excited when he had gone. Surely he had seemed very calm; but Antonio was a devil and the devil could be calm enough. A curious rumor came into the plaza and was bandied about recklessly, and battered and made much misshapen in the bandying. Somebody had seen the young priest, Durant, with Antonio, walking along an outer street. They had been in earnest

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conversation. The Mexican boy who observed this astonishing phenomenon could report all manner of circumstantial evidence, drawn from his personal inspection and to him convincing, that Antonio was luring the young priest away. As for Antonio's purpose—well (darkly hinting) they knew the Borregos, they had lived through the day—they might surmise for themselves. Of course it might not be; but surely the officers were not alert.

There were people constantly coming from all quarters of the town, and new rumors floated into general circulation and distortion. It was said the much disliked Madret was not idle. He was laying aside his robes and taking up the matter like a soldier. Something would be done. He was in coöperation with the sheriff and his gang of deputies; he was drafting men out of the church to fight this uprising of Antonio's.

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Oh, there were doubtless hundreds now preparing.

There was excitement enough at this. Where were the men gathering? Nobody knew. How would the outbreak be made? Who was with the sheriff? Could they not send for the soldiers? Would they guard the church? Nobody knew. Some conjectured old Fort Marcy might come into use. No—Antonio's men would perhaps attack the cathedral. One thing alone they really knew: Some one had seen the older priest upon a horse.

The last rumor that came was exciting indeed. There was a clue to the disappearance of Patricio—no, a certainty of his coming capture. Several people had seen a carriage, shortly after the murder, rolling out of the city along the trail that led to the Drexel Pass. The sheriff knew his course now; he was arming his gang. The priest, too, it was whispered, was gathering men.

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Doubtless Antonio would marshal his forces and attempt to prevent the pursuit. Many men hastened for horses. If there was to be a murderer-chase across the prairie they, opinionless, excitable people that they were, would join; but they would keep on its outskirts until Antonio's hundred men should be whipped by the priest and the sheriffs.

It was for a last attention to Sofia that Antonio went down San Francisco Street. Durant was coming with the horses as soon as practicable. The Mexican knew that, despite his release from custody, his liberty yet hung upon a chance. He might be arrested again at any moment—before long, indeed, must surely be. But he would act his natural self until the end, the while his plans, with all possible speed, matured. He walked into the quiet thoroughfare where stood the dwelling of his brother. The street was deserted; there was no light in the house. Some of the eastern glamour of the

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moon came here, however. By that faint glow Antonio perceived a single form sitting motionless on the doorstep. Coming closer he could detect the disconsolate visage, the rotund form, the chagrin, of Jimpse. Jimpse said never a word—only sat looking at nothing, and wheezed.

“Ho! Jimpse!” said Antonio, bending down and scanning the face.

Jimpse avoided his eyes, something like a groan escaping him.

“What now—get up! The girl—Sofia—what is the matter?”

The groan was very audible. Jimpse looked vaguely all about upon the ground as though hunting some other place to sit, where he might not encounter this publicity. He gave up the search in dejection.

“Isn’t there any one inside?” inquired Antonio anxiously.

“No.”

“Where is Sofia?”

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"Took away."

"What do you mean?"

"Took away—and you'll be took away."

"You mean arrested?"

He meant arrested.

"When?"

"W'y—now, right now. Jist left round the corner. Three of 'em had her. She's shut up—jail. O Lord!"

"Did they say why?"

"Bein' mixed in it—they said. You aint a minute; git away, quick."

There came noiselessly into the street two horses, astride one of which sat Durant. Antonio was on the point of mounting.

"Tony!" said Jimpse huskily.

"Well?"

"Wait till I git one o' my teamin' horses. It aint a minute away. I'm a-goin'."

Antonio suspected. He paused a second.

"Why?" he asked.

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Jimpse only wandered weakly about, having arisen from the step.

"Why?"

"I'll—I'll maybe find somethin' fer you—out there—out there on the prairies somewhere," said Jimpse miserable, looking always at the ground.

"God help us!" cried Antonio, swinging himself into his saddle.

"Taint no use o' my stayin' here now, Tony. Maybe I can find out there, goin' along by itself out there—maybe I can find, you know—find *somethin'*."

"Make all possible haste," broke in Durant, "and come."

When they left the city they numbered thirteen.

Five miles over the sand and never a word. Six miles, seven miles, and the moon floated higher and left a little of its yellow in the lower east. On every side was blank nothingness, save always the mountains.





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To Jimpse, who brought up a tardy rear, it was all like a dark mist. It had not come over him until they were five miles gone, to question why he was here. The thought had rankled deeply in him ever since. Yet the cause was conscience, and some murky idea that he must make reparation for the flight of the girl. But how or why he could not reason out; the night sat gloomily upon him; he was an indifferent rider and uncomfortable. The confusion of the day, the funeral, the murder; a nameless dread of the future swirled his faculties. He galloped joltingly along muttering to himself in time with his horse's feet:

"Et too much."

The ten men between him and his leaders, Antonio and Durant, had motives and emotions of their own. Ortiz and Marino, each almost a giant, were by nature little short of mountain brigands, hating the town, order, white men, civilization; ready for fight

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on any provocation. Salazar was a small and wiry Mexican, nervous, keen, desperate, having had long ago some quarrel of his own with the church. The ten were fully armed, there being among them and their companions, Antonio and Durant, numerous revolvers and two rifles. Money provided by Salazar and Durant had purchased ammunition. Behind the saddles of three of the horsemen, also, were packs containing such food as they had been able to gather in their haste.

Seven miles away, with the line of the mountains higher, the horses were let down into a more even prairie trot, a trifle slower, steady and sure. Antonio, looking always straight before him, descried a spot in the haze of moonlight.

"Some one in front," he said to Durant.

Durant strained his eyes and also perceived the spot.

They came up to the figure after a time,

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the figure of a girl, upon a burro that trotted mincingly across the plain. She had heard the beat of their horses' hoofs long since, not knowing whether they were friends or enemies, whether Antonio were behind or before. She had trotted on, therefore, and turned not at all.

Even now, when they were close to her, she rode straight forward, the wind tangling her hair, the burro's ears swinging like great wings, placidly. Antonio spurred his horse to the front and lifted her from the saddle. She came up with a gasp, knew intuitively who it was, and settled down on the horse. She had some idea that they would scold her, but cared little. They called a halt, took the always present rope from the saddle of one of the men, tied it about the burro's neck, and fastened its other end to the steed of Mr. Jimpse.

"Make him come on," said Antonio. "We

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may need him in the rocks; he would be a sign of the course if we left him."

There was no more said, no time to turn back with the girl, no inclination to express wonder or disapprobation. Trotting away again, Antonio held her closer to him. Devil that he was and filled with the murder of the day and the desperation of the night, he found his thoughts strangely on the tangle of her hair. Mr. Jimpse behind, again feeling himself the culprit, tugged at the unwilling burro, who came only like one to a very unpleasant engagement indeed, letting the rope pull his neck far out and crookedly, and withal trotting in a manner never known before.

## CHAPTER XI

**T**HE elder priest was indeed upon a horse. There was a straggling cavalcade of fifty men riding out over the desert in the night, the second cavalcade that had ridden out thus, and both were armed. He of the thin lips and the sickly face rode in the center. Near him was the sheriff. There was much attempt at haste and little haste.

The party was silent. The priest's eyes wandered over it as he rode. This man here, he knew, was fierce. That one there, a coward. This other, a fanatic. Still another was too high of character fitly to be here. What, thought he, was the nature of the force that held them together? The night was still, the breeze cool and restful. The party jarred with the night, rode recklessly, were discordant. Madret passed his

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hand over his forehead and dropped it listlessly to the saddle-horn.

"Make haste—make haste!" said the sheriff at his ear. "We are doing it bunglingly. They hang back on account of you. Can't you ride faster?"

"It is fast enough," said Madret.

The moon showed his lips tight over his teeth. The sheriff at his side looked askance and often at his face. Miles were left behind them, blank miles—with only a few lights of the city far to the rear. Before, the line of the mountains rose dimly, higher into the sky. A wolf scudded away, a coyote—yonder in the night—wailed piteously. The purposes of the men seemed non-centered. Some were for dashing on, and were many yards ahead. Some gathered about the silent Madret. Some grew faint-hearted and hung back.

It seemed a pitiable caricature of a force, even of a mob. Some unhealthy idea came

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to Madret that these men ought to wear bedraggled feathers in their hats, ought to carry grimy banners in their hands, ought to be on European streets of long ago, crying for bread, or parliaments, or kings. Faith, which is the life of anything, whether it be true faith or animal passion, flickered out thus in the night. The vast wideness and silence diffused it, swallowed it up. Yet, it might come again.

The horses' feet beat muffled on the earth. There was galloping, but irregular. The sheriff again prodded Madret. Madret could hasten no more. Time going on, the priest was falling farther and farther to the rear. The sheriff was exasperated. When Madret was nearly the last, the full moon showed his face quite plainly, set. The mountains rising higher to the front, formless—the sheriff bent his eyes searchingly and for long on Madret.

It occurred to him that Madret's eyes were

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closed. The face too, was sickly beyond its wont. The horse was going more and more slowly, drooping its head, receiving no attention. The sheriff had but just observed this when they were left the last of the straggling company. There could be no doubt that the priest was swaying dizzily in the saddle. The sheriff spurred quickly to his side and caught him as he half fell upon his horse's neck. He was up again in a moment and they stood in the desert, the sheriff holding him.

"I'll—I'll go back," said Madret huskily. He was plainly sick.

"You don't dare!" answered the sheriff, holding him up and perspiring. "It's all up if you do. Come, wake up; grind it down. You've got to go on!"

"Let's—let's—give it up," said the other faintly. "It's no use. We'll go back."

"What in the devil's name has got into you? Give it up, eh? Well I guess not!

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You're sick—straighten yourself up. You'll get over it. You've got to go on. It'll fail without you. The she-devil, you know."

Madret shuddered and closed his eyes.

"Come back—come back!" he cried, with something like desperation. "It's no use—it has gone beyond me—got away from me. I'm sick—I can't go."

Others to the front had noticed him, and were returning. Madret straightened himself in the saddle, set his face again, and rode on. He went faster now, almost furiously, so that he was in the lead with the sheriff still at his side.

Toward midnight they were among *mesas*. The trail here was rocky and rough. The sheriff beheld the priest dashing recklessly over it. He warned him that his horse would fall. Madret did not seem to hear. The beast, however, was sure and kept his feet. The others were following stragglingly, though the deputies tried to keep them to-

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gether. At the corner of a *mesa*, where they turned an angle sharply, Madret swayed again in his saddle; but was sitting straight once more before the sheriff had time to fear that he would fall. The way became a rugged ascent between cañon walls, thousands of feet apart at first, but standing closer together as they proceeded. There was a small stream leaping near the right-hand precipice, and between this and the wall itself they rode. The horses must go more slowly now. Rocks impeded the advance. Some pine trees, too, grew at the base of the cliff, whose shadow shut away the moon and left darkness.

They came at length to a black thing in the rocks. The sheriff rode to it and paused. Madret had stopped some yards behind. The sheriff made a pine torch and lighted it; and they all, Madret borne along among them, came and looked.

It was the priest's own carriage, brought

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up short against a boulder, the tongue broken, the traces cut. The night wind caught the door as it swung open, beat it against its casing, and wantoned blasphemously among the sacred cushions.

The sheriff said nothing—only held the torch closer to Madret. Many had dismounted, but the priest kept his seat. For some reason they all stood and looked at him. Some remnant of the curious smile came to his large mouth. Still sick, he sat and looked at the carriage.

Yet no one spoke; they got upon their horses and the company rode on. Vast rocks and walls showed that these were now the mountains. At two o'clock the thing occurred that stopped them. A bullet came and killed the horse of one who rode at the front.

They huddled together. There was only darkness up the cañon. They dismounted and held a consultation. The sheriff saw

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Madret walk a little distance away and sit down upon a stone with his head in his hands. Farther on and up, the cañon narrowed. A fine place for a fortification. These men about, understood little of that which was to be done. It would be dawn in an hour or two. They would wait, said the sheriff. When the horses were secured and the men settled in the waiting, the sheriff walked up the cañon to the spot under the wall where Madret still sat with his head in his hands.

"If you know anything you haven't told us, you'd better out with it now," said the officer gruffly.

Madret moved not at all.

"You'd better out with it now," repeated the sheriff.

"I know nothing," said Madret.

"It's a lie!" replied the sheriff.

Madret arose, took his arm, and pulled him away, farther still up the cañon, follow-

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ing the wall with his other hand. He stopped and leaned against the rock.

"Did you bring the tent?" he asked.

The officer laughed in some scorn at the thought of it.

"Yes, a little one. They are getting a pole for it now. It's a queer time for a tent."

"It's only to keep up the idea of the church and the priest. That is all that holds them together." Madret still leaned against the wall.

"I'll do none of the fighting," he continued presently. His voice seemed weak.

"Priests can't fight, eh? I call it cowardice, just plain."

"Call it what you like," said Madret wearily. He sank down almost to a sitting posture.

"I may give it all up yet," continued the priest, after several minutes of silence.

"*You* give it up? See here. It's the end

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of it fought out, here and now. I'm going to capture those devils!"

Madret was again resting his head in his hands.

"But you might have to do it alone. You see I could call all these others off at any time."

"What has got into you?" fiercely. "Are you crazy?"

Madret made no reply. The sheriff wondered at him sitting silent.

"Tell me this," began Madret, then paused.

"Well, what fool idea now?"

"What could be done with—with the girl if she were caught?"

"The she-devil?"

Madret rested his forehead on his knees; his fingers were in his hair. For a minute he said nothing.

"The girl," he repeated.

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"I know what ought to be done with her. She ought to be hanged."

Madret's fingers twisted in his hair.

"As for what will be done with her, it depends on what she does, that's all."

The sheriff was much puzzled. He waited perhaps three minutes for Madret to rise or speak. Then he broke out.

"I've got to risk you now. I've got to depend on the thing we've built up. But say—Madret, why in hell did you do it!"

Madret arose after a time and took the sheriff's arm, hanging to him strangely, perhaps because he himself was almost staggering, and pulled him away again down the cañon.

The remarkable idea of the tent had been carried out, even to a candle. To it they led Madret, that priest who was not a priest, and he sat down within.

## CHAPTER XII

ONE might search the Rockies from north to south and not find a region in all that mighty range of mountains wilder or more rugged than this. Two of the hugest peaks, standing the one close to the other, seem to have suddenly broken off in their intention to coalesce, and instead stand opposing, the one to the other, their bare and towering cliffs. These walls, a mile or more apart at first, stand closer and closer as the traveler climbs the rocky trail between them. Having come to within sixty feet of each other, they separate again and gradually recede.

The trail rising steeply and constantly from the spot where the gorge gives outlet into the more open country, arrives at a point beyond the cliffs, where the mountains join. It has now ascended almost to the

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summit of the peaks, and standing there upon its windy height, one may look down the long decline, see the cliffs grow beneath him, narrowing toward their centers like the lines of some great X, almost touching at the X's middle, thence separating again, mountain jaws, toward the *mesas* in the distance. At the point of seeming intersection of these walls, is the Drexel Pass, barely twenty yards in width, midway of the long incline, floored with boulders, its bounding walls standing full two thousand feet above. Beside the trail and through the pass runs a little stream of mountain water, hissing and gurgling about the rocks, tumbling on into the open ways among the lower hills.

At the X's middle in the night, lay a line, blacker than the night, across the chasm floor. Commencing at one cliff wall it stretched over the little stream to the other. Had the sheriff's men proceeded they would have found themselves stumbling among

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heaps of stones and halting at that barrier. Material yet lay all about, the loose material which Nature had put there. The floor of the pass was strewn with it. The waters of the stream ran gurgling about it; it lay in piles farther up against the cliffs, without form in the night. On the upper side of the line it was cleared away a little.

There were men crouched on this upper side. If they stooped a trifle below shoulder height, the stones they had put there shut away even the gloom of the lower cañon. The barricade was rude, somewhat formless, hastily made. On the far side—the side facing the lower cañon—it was rounded, having a more gradual descent to the cañon floor. On the upper side it was made as abrupt as possible, as nearly like a wall, so that the men were under it. Parts of it here, however, were rounded also. This wall, being unbroken, forming a solid fortress across the pass, let the stream come down

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and splash it. Having done so, the water, barely a foot in width, huddled itself up in alarm, maneuvered restlessly, discovered apertures between and under the stones, gave the stones the slip, and went its way down the cañon. There were loopholes through the wall.

Scarcely a sound was to be heard there. A hundred yards or more up the cañon, above the barricade, stood a dozen pines against the cliff. The night air found its own music in the trees, the branches nodding, nodding. Whispers of the thing that was sung came floating down over the barricade. The stones of the barricade, being dead things, gave no hint of the frantic labor that had reared them there, nor of the fact that two short hours before they had lain strewn about the gorge.

One hundred yards below the barricade, and behind a boulder, there was another man crouched. A rifle was in his hands and

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he looked always down the cañon. There was little but blackness to see, however constantly he looked. Under the most distant of the pines, above the barricade, was a group of shadows. The horses were there gathered, standing with drooped heads. They were tied to the trees and to the rocks, fifteen of them.

Under the nearest of the pines, not far from the horses and at the base of the cliff, a small spot of white was faintly visible upon the ground. It was the face of Ramoncita. She was asleep upon a bed of pine needles.

To and fro, near the left end of the barrier, to and fro for hours paced he who was the author of it all. The night did not reveal his face. The high shoulders were stooped a little, as though weighted down. The step, however, showed something of the tension of the spirit.

At the center of the barricade, Antonio

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crouched, looking always into the lower gloom. Out of the darkness at his right there came the breathing of another; beyond him the breathing of a third; beyond him, that of a fourth. To the left, as well, the shadow of the wall held other shadows. Mr. Jimpse had sat down against the right-hand cliff. Some freak of his breath proclaimed his slumber.

The middle of the night came on. There was nothing said. It was merely that they waited. A little way above the barricade, beside the stream, Durant stood and watched Mathilde walking slowly up the cañon to the pines. She went into the upper shadow and he could see her no more.

For long there had been the promise of a little light. The two thousand feet of bare eastern cliff had stood straight and black into the sky. Down the western cliff had crept, from its upper edge, the line of the moon where the light met the shadow.

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Durant saw it slowly descending the wall of rock. It came at last to the cañon floor, was crawling across it. Into the narrow rift of moonlit sky that roofed the chasm came the moon itself, silvering the precipices. The breezes frolicked in the rocks. The stream, still bewildered by the barricade, shone. The moon floated serenely away and the line of its light began to climb the eastern cliff.

Durant walked to the barricade and along its entire length.

"You would better look after her," whispered Antonio, not turning.

The other obeyed. He followed the stream toward the pines and, leaving it, approached the wall into whose gloom Mathilde had vanished. He found her sitting by the girl. The moon was not so far gone but that its light showed the heaving of the child's breast and the one black strand of hair that the night breeze tossed upon her forehead.

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"I did not hope this—that she would sleep," said Durant.

"I told her," replied Mathilde, startled not at all, though he had thought her unconscious of his approach, "that we should need her in the morning to sing for us and cheer us up, when—when the time comes."

Durant had previously been lost in wonder at Mathilde's endurance. Like the others, she had worked in silence; she was swifter than they and stronger than Durant could have guessed. Her muscles had seemed steel and her will indomitable. She had looked at no one about her, had been oblivious of the night.

Seeing her now, he could not deny that he loved her. Almost he laughed at himself—he, the product of a life so different, here and loving her. Merely the form of her, there clear in the haze the moon had left, aroused every deepest emotion of his heart. It could be but little to him, but it

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might serve her; he would not crush it. He knew that he could not. He knew the thing that drew him was not merely the fascination of a beautiful woman. She herself was as far from fitting that solution as was he. This—the night, the silence, the thing that hung distorted in the hours to come—was beyond that kind of love. As for her, she was too still, too calm, always in a too terribly desperate frame of mind, to accord with ordinary fascination.

Wherever he sees it, a man admires and is drawn to steadfastness of purpose. If the purpose becomes a great intensity of life, powerful concentration of being, it awes and masters him. That is why he stands for hours before the cage of a tigress. There is some unknown depth of life showing in the eyes, the ceaseless walking to and fro. He feels that he is in the presence of a matter of more tragic concern than his own spirit could contain; hence he is fascinated.

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If he sees that tragedy looking from the eyes of a woman—why should it not refuse to let him go? To some men love means a wild career toward a violent end. Wrenching him suddenly away from that which had been himself, it was all of that to Durant; but in a sphere higher, more unselfish. He would save the girl, by the grace of heaven, if he could.

She turned somewhat away from him and bent over her sister.

"Tell me this," she said quietly; "who is leading those—those who are to come?"

"I believe that it is Madret," he answered.

She was bending lower and made no reply. He could not see her face. At last he could bear it no more.

"Mathilde!" he said, "why are you always so silent—so inscrutable?"

"I do not mean to be, Señor," she replied.

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"But—*Dios!* isn't it enough? Surely God himself is silent!"

He noticed her long fingers on her sister's dress. He had previously wondered at the power and grace in them.

"Mathilde," he said again, "this is a time for the heart to come out—we have come to the top of the wave; forgive me if I say what I should not. I can not bear to see you so cold, so far away, when I know you could not always have been so. I wish to help you."

She said nothing for some minutes.

"You are very good," she replied.

"No. Rather—I am lost. I almost wish to-night or to-morrow might end it—for me."

"It is likely to do so for us all. But it is foolish to wish it. Yet it is your being lost that proves you good, Señor."

"But you distrust me."

"You know it is hard for me to trust a priest," she replied.

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"Even now?" he asked, beseechingly.

"I have argued many times that you could not have a voice like yours and be—like the other."

"I have broken away from the other; give me the credit of that. Myself and that life could not be together."

"For that I think I trust you."

"Then let me help you—trust me further!"

She looked fully at him.

"You do not know what you say, Señor."

An impulse to say it all, came to him; but he restrained it.

"I know only myself, Mathilde; not you."

She was silent again.

"Mathilde, it is deep pain to me to think of you. You have faith in no one, nothing."

"The child, Durant."

"Ah—yes; Ramoncita."

"You mean men."

"Yes."

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"No; I could not. Except these wild ones; Patricio, Antonio. No white men."

"The white are nearer your blood than these."

"How do you know? If I am Spanish, then perhaps my blood is oriental. Perhaps a little of it is Indian. Perhaps, too, I am not Spanish. But, considering me so—those are peoples who fasten faith on something that stands, that is durable; the same, the rock, the thing to be trusted because it is to-day what it was yesterday, and to-morrow what it is to-day. Where," she asked, with a very faint touch of bitterness, "should I look for that?"

"And I have changed," he replied. "It came like a storm in the night; I am not the same. What do you think of one who believed he had put his heart in a work of good, revolted, took up the wild cause of a murderer, dared to let that come into his soul which he had sworn to put away, fled

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from the law and the bonds of civilization, recklessly risked death in an alien cause?"

He was speaking quietly. He knew that were the chance open to him he would not retrace his steps.

"Is it alien?" she asked.

For some seconds he watched her. The mountains seemed suddenly his friends, the wildness of the night his home. The desperation about him, the death that threatened, the life that lay hidden in the girl's eyes,—it was all suddenly his life, part of himself.

"No," he replied.

"Then I should say, Señor, that he has done the greatest thing that he could do."

Silence for a moment, and Mathilde arose. Then she spoke, slowly:

"And what of one who put his heart for all time, with no change, into a cause that is—hell, and hell only?"

He turned quickly more fully to her. The coldness of the words had sent a thrill of

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horror through him. She stood still, her eyes fastened on him, shining in the night. He was bewildered, eager to know her heart. He seemed to see her sinking from him.

"Mathilde!" he cried, "in God's name, what is it? I could not answer you without the knowledge. Trust it to me!"

"You could not understand," was her response; "trust it to me instead."

A sudden flash down the cañon; the quick report of a rifle rang into the night. With a bound Patricio was at the barricade, his weapon in his hand. He was followed by Durant, running, and by Mathilde and Ramoncita, the latter having thrown herself free of her slumber in an instant. They found Antonio and the rest of the watchers straining their eyes into the gloom beyond, standing tense with weapons aimed. There was plunging and snorting, as of some animal in pain, far down the chasm; and almost

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at once the outpost Mexican came clearing the rocks and leaped behind the barricade.

"There is a band of them coming!" he cried.

"Could you see?" whispered Antonio sharply.

"Only that there were men and horses."

"You have hit one of the horses. Everybody keep low and still, revolvers ready. That shot will stop them."

The plunging below continued for a time. They could hear the sound of suppressed voices coming now and then faintly over the rocks up the steep. Presently it seemed that the wounded animal lost its power of struggling, and the sounds ceased. There was nothing but blackness in the gorge below. Absolute silence reigned save for the quick breathing of those behind the barricade.

A full half hour passed by and still no sound. Ramoncita had climbed half way up

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the slanting piles of stone and sat crouched close to Durant. He perceived that the child's breathing was quiet and natural, and wondered if she never dreamed of fear.

"They have stopped," said Durant.

"And will wait till daylight," replied Antonio. "Nobody would be fool enough to come on in the dark. They know this pass well. They know we should be beyond it if we didn't intend holding it."

"What do you think, Salazar?" asked Patricio.

"I think he is right," came Salazar's voice out of the gloom. "It will be dawn in an hour, and they will wait."

"We are fair at that ourselves," said Durant. "Let the girl go back."

"Mathilde, take the girl away," said Antonio. "Ramoncita!"

"I am all right here by the Padre," whispered the girl. "Antonio, you let me stay!"

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"No; go back; there is nothing to do. Are you armed?"

"Give me a revolver."

"Have you two, Marino?" whispered Antonio.

"Yes."

"Give her one of them."

A strange sensation came over Durant, feeling her move beside him to take the weapon.

"Can you use it?" he asked in awe, still watching the cañon.

"Hm!" was her only reply.

"Mathilde, are you armed?" asked Patricio.

"Yes."

"Take the girl back."

She got Ramoncita away, and after a moment returned. Durant could indistinctly see her standing between himself and Antonio.

"Jimpse!" called Durant in a whisper.

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"Hi!"

The reply came huskily from near the ground.

"Are you armed?"

"No."

"Take this." It was Ortiz's voice. They could hear him groping for Jimpse's hand.

"All right?"

"Yes."

## CHAPTER XIII

**N**OT a member of the band of desperates but would have preferred to meet the attack at once and have it done. The waiting seemed worse than death itself. The empty gloom of the heart that night adds to a sense of danger, was there; the gloom that seems almost to undermine courage, to sap the will. Somewhere in that black hole before and below them lay death, waiting. Any minute the bullets might sing over their heads or spit against the rocks, or find a warmer resting place. No one knew what enemy was below, what his numbers or his purposes; only that he was there and the night covered him.

The hour passed and a little light washed the far summits of the cliffs and began to be sifted slowly down, lower and lower into

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the chasm. A little while longer, and it had reached the bottom and was spreading itself out over the rocks. Presently, almost at once, it seemed, they could descry forms far down the cañon. A little longer and all was plain.

Several hundred yards below on the long ascent, and at a point where the receding cliffs stood a thousand feet apart, there were grouped men and horses. The animals were standing silent, the reins thrown over their heads. The men, too, for the most part, seemed motionless. Now and then one moved from a portion of the group to another. As the light came they were plainly scrutinizing the barricade as intently as Antonio and his men kept watch from behind it.

"The cowards!" muttered Patricio under his breath.

Antonio said nothing. He was estimating their number.

"How many?" asked Durant.

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"I should say there are fifty," answered Antonio.

There was no blanching of faces, no change in the deliberate desperation of the men. Durant heard Mathilde, near him, draw a deep breath, and saw her press more closely to the rocks.

Thus the two forces stood and faced each other; the one small, desperate, well fortified, and fully conscious of the strength of its opponents; the other outnumbering it four to one, perhaps almost as desperate, but fully exposed should it attack the fort, and to some extent ignorant of the number it must fight.

The pursuing party was halted near the eastern cliff. At a distance of a hundred yards from it, across the stream to the west, Durant's eyes caught the light from a white object standing among the rocks.

"Can you recognize any of them, Antonio?" asked Salazar.

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"I know the sheriff and three deputies," replied Antonio.

Almost at once they perceived the meaning of the white object Durant had noticed.

"Ah, now I understand the tent," said Antonio contemptuously.

Mathilde stirred a little at his side.

"The priest," said Durant.

"Yes," continued Antonio with cool irony, "the church has entered the holy war under the guidance of Madret. They bring a tent and set him at a distance."

"Coward!" muttered Patricio.

Mathilde's face looked cruel and white. Durant, watching her long fingers on the rocks, saw them twitch and draw up into the palms.

It was now observed that three men of the sheriff's party were riding away down the pass. The minutes going by, the three disappeared. The quick instinct of Antonio interpreted at once the movement. Having

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taken full account of the barricade, the deputies were going on a search for some opening behind it.

With undaunted assurance Antonio explained the situation to his company. He knew the mountains too well to be afraid. There was no possible way around, save a perilous, almost fatal course, of fifty miles in circuit, over the ruggedest of untraveled ranges. To accomplish that required many days. The other pass, fifteen miles to the northwest, led, it is true, across the mountains, but by a trail nowhere joining this, and separated from it by impassable cliffs. There was, then, but one thing to be feared from the reconnaissance—that they would be compelled to wait perhaps the rest of the day. Should they withdraw, the party below would know it; and so long as they held the barricade, there was no cause for haste.

Thus the small opposing forces sat down

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in arms and waited. Mr. Jimpse, still confused and wretched, served out scant breakfast. He was more at home in doing that; it was his sphere; he felt his wings take the air. The hours of the morning crept slowly on to the sunlit noon. The sun himself came into the rift of the cliffs and poured pure light through the chasm depths. The afternoon came, the sun sailed over the western cliff and disappeared. Once more Mr. Jimpse fed his flock and once more the hours crept by.

And almost all the day Mathilde stood by the barricade. She spoke to none of her companions and raised her eyes scarcely a single time from the cañon and the trail that descended it, or from the rocks strewn over the chasm to the tent of the priest below.

## CHAPTER XIV

ONE chief thing served through these hours of watching to keep at its highest pitch the spirit of the desperates. The stress of the flight, the frantic labor, the sleeplessness, the strain of delay, might have undermined the courage of even less determined men. It was Ramoncita who diverted their thoughts.

The girl, seemingly grown older, was yet as alert, as full of life and motion, as some wild creature of the mountains. She had slept soundly. Filled with the natural elation of young spirits, through all the hours of the afternoon she leaped about the stones, shouting to this comrade and to that, climbing upon the barricade and daring, majestically, the whole force of the pursuers to come and take her, flinging back her black hair from her face, laughing scornfully

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aloft, running away again to return at once with water for Patricio or bread for Durant. The men's eyes followed her. She was like an incarnation of their most buoyant courage; reckless of life; unconscious, in the extreme of unselfishness. The mountain waters could not have been more swiftly agile, nor the mountain air have brought with it over the rocks more of the breath of freedom.

And yet they saw that she, too, felt some of the futility of it all. Her very daring had in it something of the air of tragedy, and at times she would stand at the barricade beside Mathilde and stare with her down the cañon. The face was then serious, the eyes still. The features possessed something of the grim sternness of her savage ancestry, a sternness which sat strangely upon her, which seemed to defy the fact that the features themselves were not stern—were those of a girl. After that she would suddenly leap upon the stones once more and dare

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them all. And now and then she sang, cutting up the phrases of the love dirge which she did not understand, into a wild war song:

*"See! the white moon shines on high;  
Whiter is my true love's shroud,  
Whiter than the morning sky,  
Whiter than the evening cloud.  
My love is dead!"*

Many times Antonio, the devil, turned his eyes from his enemies and watched her. Nothing of his face showed tenderness save the eyes; there was some of it in them.

"Look!" said Patricio beside him.

It was now four o'clock. He followed the direction of his brother's eyes. Far down the cañon the three deputies were rounding a corner of the cliff, returning. Antonio laughed a short, contemptuous laugh.

"They have wasted their time," he said.  
"The waiting is ended."

The three horsemen joined the main body

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of the enemy. Those behind the barricade crowded close to the stones. Ramoncita was with them. They had tried to make her stay beyond, shielded by the horses. She had simply defied them. Some spirit of wildness had been born in her. She had told them plainly that they might put her there, but that, the fight once on, she would return. They knew that she meant it. She was perched now, revolver in hand, beside Mathilde.

Madret came out of the little tent, crossed the stream, and joined the parley. He seemed feeble. They saw him raise his hands above the crowd before him as in prayer. Turning, he re-entered the tent.

"The coward!" cried Patricio. "The devilish priest stays behind! Let him come on! Let him come on!"

When the attack was made, Madret indeed remained behind.

Quickly a double line of battle was formed

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below. The sheriff and his men, and a portion of the others, composed the first division; the rest formed some yards behind. The course being rocky and steep, the horses were abandoned. The attack would be made on foot. The first division, in a compact line, armed with rifles, bayonets fixed, began the quick march upon the barricade.

"Down behind the rocks!" called Durant. "Every one of you find a loophole. Aim at the heart of the man most nearly before you. Antonio will give the word to fire."

The sixteen of them were crouched and ready at once. Antonio and his brother, side by side, held the center of the barricade, Durant being upon the extreme right. Close to Patricio, tense, silent, kneeled Mathilde; and between Mathilde and Durant were Ramoncita, Salazar, two of the other Mexicans, and Jimpse. Upon the left of Antonio crouched the five remaining Mexicans under the more direct supervision of Ortiz and Marino.

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Durant could hear Jimpse's intermittent breathing and felt that upon him at least little could be relied.

The line below came on and the rear one started, following at a distance. Without a word or the flinching of a muscle, the barricaders waited. The enemy coming nearer, each mentally selected his man and aimed at the heart. From the first line below there was a blue cloud of smoke, a ringing multitude of reports, and the spattering of a score of wasted bullets on the stones.

A quick snort, behind and up the cañon, told that one ball, passing over the barricade, had found its way among the horses. There followed an immediate and tremendous braying. The burro was slightly hurt, a wound of the hide only. The pain caused him to break his rope. The small gray beast, terrified at the rattle of the shots, dethroned from his habitual, historical repose at last, came dashing down the cañon, kicking his

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hoofs into the air, sliding over loosened fragments of rock, tripping on the rope's entangling end, braying until all that mighty chasm caught the sound and hurled it back and forth between the walls.

At the puff of smoke, Durant had heard the teeth of Jimpse click violently together. Seeing now the burro (which had been given into his charge) coming full at him, the teamster, trembling, jumped into the mesh of the unwarranted conclusion that it must be stopped. Not knowing what he did, but fearfully rejoiced that here was something else than guns, he seized the animal about the neck and scrambled on its back.

The presence of the barricade had rendered the burro's purpose for a second diffused. He whirled about, lifting his voice, circling dizzily. Jimpse seized the rope and would have turned him back, in panic kicking his irresponsive sides; but the docility of his steed had fled with its self-restraint.

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Close to Durant, that portion of the barricade which joined the cliff was built more slanting than the rest. The burro's roving eye caught sight of it. Accustomed as he was to rocks and mountain climbing, he felt the inspiration of his native sphere. Dashing at the stones, he sprang upon them and clambered up, slipping. Jimpse clung helplessly about his neck. Attaining the summit, the frightened animal took three quick jumps down the opposite side and went braying away into the lines of the approaching force.

Grimly looking on, the holders of the fort beheld the teamster's capture. One of the enemy took him and led him down the cañon to the camp, the burro going his thunderous way at will, far into the lower distance, out of sight and hearing.

There was but a moment's delay in the offensive ranks. Closing more compactly, the first line now responded to the sheriff's

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sudden cry of charge, and came running up the ascent.

"Fire!" cried Antonio, and fifteen shots rang out. Six of the first rank and one of the rank beyond fell, four of them dead, the three others crawling. With a shout of rage the rear rank came leaping up to join their comrades, and the thickest of the fight was on.

Three volleys from the barricade cut away the exposed attack. Wavering at first, plunging raggedly on again, falling, rising, closing together, the sheriff's men became confused, fear-stricken at the strength of the opposing force; fired a final shot into the barricade; fell back to re-form. Two of the last bullets entered between the rocks upon the left and killed Marino and a Mexican beside him.

Ramoncita, the spirit of fight beating in her pulses, would have been at once upon the barricade and crying her daring after the

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retreating force. Mathilde held her back. As it was, she stood defiantly, her eyes glowing, a wild, unnatural figure.

In the few moments respite two of the Mexicans carried the bleeding bodies of their comrades a little way back, and returned. Ramoncita had looked for an instant, with white cheeks, at the blood, but turned again and stooped beside her sister. Mathilde had not moved. Patricio, cursing to himself, crouched ready for the next attack.

"If we did it once we can do it again," said Antonio.

In these cañon depths the dusk was now gathering. The lines below had re-formed. Their bayonets glistened—they were coming on. In two compact ranks they charged, full speed, mad with blood. Antonio waited until they were close; they were saving their shots.

"Fire!" he cried again.

Again the ranks were cut in pieces; again

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the falling and the groans of men; but the enemy came on. Thick and fast sang the bullets from the barricaders, thick and fast spattered the lead from those below. The attack was directed chiefly toward the left. Ortiz, having lifted himself in recklessness above the rocks, gave a scream and fell back lifeless, followed by three of the Mexicans falling also. Antonio felt the sting of a bullet on his cheek. The charging men were close upon them. Almost at the barricade the lines were once more wavering, sinking back.

Two of the sheriff's deputies, springing forward, bounded over the rocks, climbed the barricade, and reached the summit. One of them, looming suddenly in front of Mathilde, made a lunge at Patricio. The bayonet went wild and before he could again gather his strength Mathilde's bullet had entered his breast. He fell across the upper stones. The other grappled with Durant. Together

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the two men swayed and struggled. But the deputy's attack and perilous ascent of the uneven fort had cost him his self-control. Durant, with every muscle in him strained to its ultimate degree, bent him slowly, slowly down to the earth, till Salazar, reaching from his post, knocked him senseless with the butt of his revolver.

The rest of the attacking party had attempted to follow, but were broken by the last volley of the besieged. They were once more in hot retreat. The second attack was ended and the barricade still held.

Nothing now could stop the savage spirit of Ramoncita. Her face hot with the excitement of the moment, her eyes flashing wide and bright, her black and tangled hair tossed from her forehead, she wilfully broke from her sister's hold, leaped up the side of the barricade, and stood upon its top facing the withdrawing column. Her slender body, straight and full of animated grace, seemed

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taller than it was; her dress, torn by the rocks, hung tattered. Clear and high she sang the battle song, flinging it to the sky:

*"See! the white moon shines on high;*

*Whiter is my true love's shroud,*

*Whiter than the morning sky,*

*Whiter than the evening cloud.*

*My love is dead!"*

One out of the retreating rank turned, saw the figure clear against the cliff beyond, and raised his gun and fired. She fell back, her form convulsed. With a cry Mathilde leaped to catch her. The small body settled on the stones, breast up, curved backward, the face hanging down within the fort.

Yet once again would they need her in the morning to sing for them and cheer them on.

## CHAPTER XV

**T**HE blood seemed to have forsaken the heart of Antonio. He believed the child dead. He wished to spring to her, to carry her body back out of this hell. A sweeping sense of emptiness, desolation and ruin came down upon him. He looked and beheld Mathilde and Durant bending over the girl. They were more skilful than he. He felt a bitter sense of his own incompetence, of their better right to minister to her. He looked again. Again he believed her dead. He shut his jaws, crouched by the barricade, and stared down into the misery of the lower cañon, seeing only a blank. Like a dog who will not forsake the grave of its master; so Antonio crushed his heart, remembered that he was the leader in the fight, that some one must watch the enemy, that the life of these his

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friends might depend upon him—and held his post. They would attend the girl—or carry her body away. It was for him to fight. His face rigid, he watched beside his brother.

That self-abnegation was new to him, but tremendous in power. He reasoned coldly, like an Indian. There had indeed come at last to Antonio Borrego something that was not a part of the play.

All those at the barricade now silently awaited a third attack.

Durant was not ignorant of medical arts. He bent his energies on Ramoncita. He would have carried her to the pines, farther up, but Mathilde was before him. She bore the girl there, Durant accompanying her. She placed her on a bed of pine needles several hundred yards beyond the barricade and at a spot hidden by an obtuse angle of the cliff. Absorbed, iron-willed, Mathilde labored with the priest.

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The girl was alive. The bullet had inflicted little more than a flesh wound, in the left side.

To Durant it seemed that all earth and the life of it had changed to him in the last hour. He felt a longing to give up the abnormal struggle, his own and theirs. Instead, he labored with the girl.

At this altitude night comes quickly. It came earlier because of the height of the cliffs. The broken ranks of the enemy could barely be seen, by those still at the barricade, in a parley below. A half hour of watching, and it was dark. A little flame appeared in the blackness of the lower distance. It leaped higher and cut a jagged hole of yellow light out of the night. The enemy was camping.

"They will wait till morning," said Antonio.

Two Mexicans carried the bodies of the slain away. The others watched.

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For an hour desolation reigned in Antonio's heart. He dared not ask if the girl lived. He morbidly hugged his own misery, unable to risk the loss of his faint hope. His ears were straining for the faintest sound behind him. He knew now at last what it meant to him; that his life must follow her; that it was not only the girl, but he himself, who lay dead or wounded yonder. Crouching, he tortured himself, picturing the torment of the knowledge of her death.

Durant then came down to him.

"She is alive," said he. "The wound is slight. If she had the proper care, it would be nothing. But here—it may grow serious before we can get her away."

He took his place at the barricade. For some minutes Antonio did not speak.

"Go back to her," he said at last, commanding. "There will be no attack till day."

Durant obeyed.

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The relief brought no joy to the Mexican. It changed the nature of the inner tumult. Henceforth, throughout the night, war waged in him. Sitting stolid as any Indian warrior, moveless, dead, he was yet torn with conflict, a conflict which the night hid no more effectually than did his visage.

He could snatch her up and carry her away. His mind plunged like a running fire through all the fancied details of that escape. He would hold her in his arms, stride on for miles, over rocks and pathless summits, holding her life by the strength of his own great body. He knew a refuge—the very place to which Patricio would finally retreat. He knew a shelter, buried away, leagues from all discovery; a hut, a bed to lay her on, an Indian doctor who could bring her back to health. His brain glowed with that pictured journey. To save her would have been the ultimate great expression of his soul; and there is no

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happiness save in the soul's expression. To hold her in his arms—to hold her, little wounded thing, in his strong arms.

But that, physically difficult, would have been, nevertheless, the easier thing to do. The real labor was to stay. Did they not need him, depend upon him? Against what fearful odds were they now, already, fighting! To abandon them seemed abandoning them to death. He looked upon his brother as all but a madman. He looked upon his Mexican allies as seeking but selfish ends. He looked upon Durant as a priest, strong, mighty in heart, but not a leader in war. He thought of Mathilde, dreamed blackly, staggered through a labyrinth of memories, of possibilities, wherein she was the central figure. Without knowing her motives, nor the stupendous power that moved her, their intensity had drawn him in, enlisted all his sympathies, so that he felt by many cords bound to her. Though dis-

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aster stalked already toward them; yet, a stern battle might still win; whereas, to desert her now would be to assure the coming of that disaster. They needed him. A hoarse voice of duty seemed crying after him. Would Ramoncita herself agree to that desertion? To her had he promised to see the tragedy played out. To him death meant little; it meant as little to the girl, or less; for she too had the instincts of the warrior. So a hundred reasons shouted to him to stay and fight.

Yet she might die. With proper care bestowed in time, he could save her. To lift her up—to hold her in his arms. Reason is a weak dwarf; emotion is the giant.

The night wore on. He arose and strode a few steps to and fro. The whole world seemed his stage, and he the dread and only actor on it. Harpies with clanging wings drove him hither and thither. Again, he was a Prometheus bound to rocks. In difficul-

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ties, the strong man is ever seized by a prodigious rage to hurl himself upon the bars that cage him, and rend. He is a true lion in his frenzy. Magnificent was the plan that made man an animal; for only thus does he act in a material world.

He came again and crouched by the barricade. At least, he knew this: The trail over which he could carry the girl when he should snatch her up and leap away, was too rugged to be traveled with profit in the night. Unable to solve the problem, he postponed the solution until dawn. He knew, nevertheless, whither his love was drawing him. He dreamed of staying on and fighting for Mathilde. Yet the power that carried him toward Ramoncita was beyond his dreams.

He would wait until dawn. He would fight—if the power would let him and the fight were not delayed. But the light once here,

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and the struggle sluggish—let the hour's own rage answer the question for him.

Durant had again approached Mathilde. Though all that the place allowed had been done for Ramoncita, Mathilde still knelt beside her. The eyes of the wounded girl were closed, though she was not unconscious. Durant was glad that it was dark.

When he approached, Mathilde arose and stepped to the cañon's center. By the faint glare of the light below, Durant saw that she seemed very much as always, calm. Yet surely the face was whiter. "Mathilde!" he cried impulsively, coming to her side. He could say no more. The very silence of her grief checked him. It was agony to him that she was suffering thus and still so far away.

"Yes, Señor," she said quietly; "I understand. You are very good."

He stood a moment beside her. He thought there was even gentleness in her

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voice. He turned and joined the Mexicans.

Two of the fallen men were still alive. The four others were dead. They being carried a little way back, the wounded ones were made as comfortable as possible. Durant spent a few moments in bathing the wounds, then came again to the barricade. He must speak twice to Antonio before Antonio would hear.

"No move," said the Mexican, finally; "they will wait till morning." An unexpected, almost bitter, freak of unselfishness came to him. "You needn't watch, Durant; we are enough. And perhaps you can do something—up there."

"There is nothing to do," replied Durant. "I will watch."

He soon arose, however, and searched for food for the others. Scarcely any of it was eaten. He himself could swallow nothing. So the second night began and stretched onward toward the coming of the moon. The

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strain of labor, long delay, and fighting, was telling on the men. Patricio lay on the ground near the barricade, the fever coming on again, but still alert, fierce. Durant felt a touch of weakness. He was unused to such tension. Antonio besought him to try to sleep. But he knew that he could not. The spirit of the mountain tragedy still held him up. He would fight it to the death. Antonio and Salazar seemed the only ones with whom fatigue could have no sway. The latter's lynx-eyes looked steadily hour after hour into the darkness below, where the fire gradually died away. Antonio rarely moved.

Ten o'clock, eleven, twelve. Scarcely even a breeze. Only the water, leaping as always, voiced the sound that one calls laughing in the day but only sits and listens to at night. The line of the moon had come creeping again down the western wall. Beneath the barricade Durant watched it slowly sinking. The weirdness of the night filled his spirit.

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The Unknown lay in those white beams upon the bare, blank cliff. The Unknown spoke out of the waters. The Unknown was the darkness, was the human struggle, was the death.

At half past one o'clock the moon floated again, serene, into the rift above. Mathilde had not come down the cañon—she was still beyond with the girl. Durant arose and strode over the rocks, climbing the ascent. He rounded an obtuse corner and came near to where she was. He had expected to find her kneeling, but she was standing, looking down. Awed by the stillness of her figure, he stood a moment in the shadow of a rock and watched her. He saw her turn toward him and take a step down the cañon.

As she did so, she raised her head; the moonlight fell upon her face. He did not know why he suddenly understood, but he knew her purpose. The eyes, the lips, the pale cheeks, seemed to cut it into his brain.

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Instantly he stepped before her. She would have passed, but he stopped her.

"Mathilde!" he cried, almost in a whisper, "Mathilde!—Stop—I must speak to you."

The moonlight seemed to add to the calm of her face.

"Yes," she said; "what is it?"

"Mathilde, come back—come back! There is something wrong! I see it in your face. It terrifies me."

"Wrong, Señor? There are many things wrong."

"But where were you going? Oh, Mathilde! why is this life of yours so lonely, so far away?"

She did not answer for a moment.

"I could not tell you why," she said at last. "I do not wish you to think I am careless of your thought for me. But, Señor, I do not need it."

"You are desperate. For God's sake tell me—tell me! I can help you!"

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She laughed and turned half away. He came nearer.

"There is something that makes hate out of every emotion of your heart. It is madness, perhaps, to ask, but I have been mad enough these two days; tell me what it is in that priest yonder in the other camp that is making life a hell to you."

She turned quickly and again would have passed him. But he stopped her.

"Let me go," still calmly. "You are kind, you are tender. I have said I know you are good. But you break it down for me; I—I do not know you—I can not understand. Let me go!"

Her eyes shone—her hand was laid upon his arm.

"Not till you have told me your purpose. No; I will not let you go."

"You would kill me as I stand," she said.

"This is a time of death; is it so uncom-

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mon? No; you have led me past that point. You will tell me."

"Señor, I will not."

He caught the glint of the moonlight upon her weapon. He would not give up.

"Death is so near us all," he said, "that killing him is not unnatural, Mathilde. I think I understand. Trust me. I ask nothing for myself, only to give my help to you. Why do you wish to kill him, and thus, alone and in the night?"

"Señor, you can guess."

"Can nothing heal it—nothing but this?"

"Nothing."

"Blindness—just heaven, it is blindness! There is no healing here, no touch of peace. I would give my life, now, to prove it to you."

"I have not sought peace, Señor. I do not know what it is. You can not move me—you need not try—you do not understand. I knew these things once. I had a heart,

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Señor. *Dios!* You know I have it still. But it was new then, like yours, boy."

"Life has been crushed for you—you do not know it," he said passionately. "Let me teach it to you. I love you; all my heart loves you. My whole life leaps to help you—lift you up!"

She passed her hand confusedly over her forehead as he spoke. She turned her face a little more toward him; he could see the depth of her eyes.

"I am not worth that," she said. "I mean it truly, for I know. You are good. I had not known one such before. It moves my heart, but it is useless."

"You have not known—no, neither the joy of living, nor the light of love. You have missed it all, Mathilde. This I can not bear! There is a love that heals all this; and this has shut you away from it. I had given myself to the church; I am cut away from that now. Let me give it all to you. To-

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morrow, perhaps, we die—let me teach you once a world of love that is higher than life itself.”

“I could not learn it; I have not lived up to it. You are right. I should not understand. I should fall back to this, where I have been bound for life.”

“Tell it all to me!”

“I will. I do not know my mother, nor my father, nor even my race; nor whether Ramoncita is my sister. We are a part of the eternal driftwood of the world. I was brought up by a European family in the City of Mexico. When I was still a little girl, they went away and brought also Ramoncita. Whence, I do not know. There was a time then when I was happy, but I think I always saw the darkness coming. There came constantly from the mines in the mountains, to my home, a son of the family. His name was Jules Maillot. I must have thought I loved him, though I do not understand it

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now. It never meant that which even I know love should mean. But I was wild with it. Everything in my life centered in it. We were married and lived unhappily together for some months. I found there were crimes to his name before—there was a worse one added after. To hide them and to get away from me, he fled. I would rather have been killed—you know it. I do not want to say the rest; only that he buried himself in the church.”

Durant bowed his head a moment. The two stood in silence.

“But I can not avoid the loving you, Mathilde. It is too strong. It is the kind of love that would take you away from crime, away from all the world that has crushed you and shut the light of God away from you. It could be nothing else to me but this—to lift you up above this purpose of yours. I do not try to hide it, I let it grow. It is

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stronger, Mathilde, deeper, than you can know."

She was trembling slightly. She had not known any man's voice like that. There was a breath of some new life, higher, flooded with light, that came with his words. But the bound heart turned back to its bonds.

"You will not go, Mathilde?"

"Yes."

"My love is beyond it—let it heal it!"

"Look at her," she said, pointing to Ramoncita, whose face was turned to the moon. "Look at her and do not tell me to change the whole current of my life in a moment. O God!" All the agony shook in the words as she turned her face away—"Ramoncita! Ramoncita!"

His arms were about her then. He was bending over her, pleading with her, pouring out the love of his heart. Only for a second she did not resist; then she put him away.

"I am not worth it, Señor; I am far below.

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I mean it truly. Yet I would have you understand. He will not come to fight us, as a man; he is the coward now as always. We owe him death—truly I believe it; for Patricio's child and Ramoncita it is justly due, and for much else. You see the snake in the rocks, it rattles at you, and you kill it. It is no crime; your conscience plays no part in that. He is but so. There is nothing else to be considered. I would kill him, Señor, as I would kill the snake, that the world may be rid of a viper. Believe me, it is passion no longer; it is conviction. Why, then, is it crime? I come from a different life from yours; to me this is right. You can not judge me as you would yourself. All the races back of me seem to have taught me this, the years of my life have strengthened it. It may not be the highest—I know that it is not—but, for me, it is nature. You can not go against that. Nature is the only thing that is right."

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"If you loved me it would teach you differently."

She stood and looked at him long. Her face was deeply sad.

"I do love you," she said.

She paused again.

"With that which is highest in me," she continued, "nearest yourself—with that I love you. My life has hardened all of me but just enough to make me understand the other. That is why it is so sad to me. I would rather have known nothing but the old slavery. Yet—with the deepest of my heart I thank you."

He could only repeat her name brokenly. She came and took his hand and kissed him once upon the lips. A certain dignity of bearing told of the fatal strength that was beyond him.

He turned and saw her walking down the moonlit trail.

## CHAPTER XVI

**T**HE night wind caught the flap of the small tent and cracked it against the upright. A great boulder at the side and back, hiding the tent, cast some of its shadow over the canvas. The canvas was faintly translucent in one large, irregular circle. Yellow light lay on its inner side and spread through to the outer. Expecting this and even other camps, they had brought candles for the priest. His mind was not so placid nor his heart so much at rest but that a candle still burned—now at half past two o'clock of this, a quiet, mountain morning.

The earth was strewn with boulders thick and large, all the way to the western cliff, toward which the cañon floor ascended. Some shrubs were there also, scrub-oak and three low pines. In front of the tent the

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uneven floor of the cañon was less rocky. It stretched away irregularly, however, a hundred yards to the stream and another hundred to the group of watchers, in the main sleepless, with the sheriff near the eastern cliff. The moon stayed longer there where the chasm was wider; had spent some hours staring with no expression at five corpses laid beside the stream. The rest were still up yonder, too near the terror of the barricade.

A sentry stood beside the corpses and kicked his foot into the water now and then, making a little splash into the night. He was one of the deputies, and this situation, though unusual, was nothing so terrible after all. Another sentry stood or paced near the group of men beside the eastern cliff, who were lying or sitting close together. This sentry was not a deputy, and to him it was terrible enough, the still moonlight alone, to say nothing of the corpses.

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He could see the form of a third sentry, whose shadow came and went among the boulders far across the stream. The third sentry, being within a few yards of the tent, turned and approached the stream, and turned again and approached the tent.

Under the shadow of the western wall, and still two hundred yards up the cañon, the figure of a girl was crouched among the rocks. The rocks themselves were not stiller than the figure. She watched the line of moonlight creeping to the tent, and scarcely breathed. As to how she had passed Antonio—she had looked at him and it was enough. She would find out some things, he thought; and they would be worth the knowing.

At three o'clock the figure of the girl still crouched among the rocks. She could see the sentries. The line of the moonlight, being the shadow of the cliff which stood behind her, had come to the boulder at the side

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of and behind the tent, and was going over it. A quarter of an hour passed and the line was just across the middle of the canvas. Still the figure among the rocks had not moved. Yet another quarter of an hour and the line was beyond, upon the ground again, and creeping toward the stream and the corpses.

The sentinel came close to the tent, and turned and walked away, going nearly to the stream. As he turned, the figure among the rocks moved, shifting quickly across a narrow open space, coming like a shadow to other rocks, shifting quickly again to others still; being nearer the tent when the sentry turned again. The sentry had gone quite to the water and talked a second, it would seem, with the other sentry. He was now coming toward the tent, walking slowly, the moonlight on him. The figure among the rocks might have been one of the rocks themselves.

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The night was so still that she could hear the man's footfalls, as he stepped on the stones. Her own breathing, however, she could not hear. He came on and, being nearer the tent, turned again and walked away. The figure of the girl shifted to other rocks and crouched again; shifted to the scrub-oak, quickly, deftly; shifted again, gliding over rough stones; came close to the great boulder and thence to that side of the tent away from the barricade.

She crouched by the canvas wall and listened. There was no sound within. Yellow light lay in the circle on the cloth, dimly. The sentry had not yet reached the stream. The figure of the girl shifted to the front, near to the flap, which the night wind, awed, had left in silence. One second more; she stopped. Her revolver was ready in the right hand, pointing to the tent. With the fingers of the left the flap was quickly lifted, fell again; the figure of the girl was within.

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They had pitched the tent just over a cubical rock some three feet high, flat upon the top. Let the supposed servant of the Lord have a desk in the wilds of the mountains, or an altar for his candle! The candle itself, glued with its own tallow, stood near one edge of the flat rock, flickering and casting hazy yellow light out into a hollow globe of darkness. The priest sat upon a smaller stone, his elbows on the other near the candle, his head between his hands, his side to the girl.

It could have been no sound that told him of her presence. Merely the horror of it must have filled the tent, and gripped his heart, and made sluggish the blood with cold. He lifted his face from his hands so that the light fell upon it, and turned his head slowly and looked at her. It was the eyes that he saw, not the weapon.

There are many ways in which a face may become ghastly. The features respond and

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vary as the terror varies. But there are things that seem to go beyond the knowledge of the features, leaving them blank; as tones go beneath the power of making sound. He looked like one dead. The forehead was gray rather than white, the eyes glazed, the two lines about the corners of the mouth so deep that the cheeks seemed withered. His voice was very low and without expression.

"Mathilde—Mathilde. It went away, out of my power. The hate died—in the night. It was not all cowardice that made me get you away. Your eyes in the church were as they were long ago. The last of the hate came up after that—but it died, in the night. It's a weak soul—and it's a perjured one—that says it, Mathilde; and I do not hope. But there is love still. I did not know it; but I—love you—now."

The reply was in whispers and slow.

"Only to-night," she said, "have I learned all that you robbed me of. You have hidden

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where you might teach punishment; I have seen to-night, and believe, the heaven that you could not teach nor know. You made life hell to me; you preached it to others. It is just that you find it now yourself."

"Shoot!" he gasped—"in God's name shoot!"

The ball struck the gray of the forehead. She was without in an instant, leaping among the rocks. The form of the sentry loomed suddenly before her. He seized her in both his arms; held her as she struggled; felt her tearing herself away; seized her once again; forced her down to the stones; and held her still at last.

The shot had roused them all. They came running up the ascent, blanched with fear, their weapons ready. When they knew what she had done, so great a fury broke out among them that they would have killed her, torn her limb from limb, upon the spot. The deputies with the sheriff at their head





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must surround her and turn their weapons on their own party and threaten instant death to him that touched her. She was finally bound fast and led away, erect now once more and her face as calm as always, to the stream, past the corpses where the moon still shone, to the camp beyond.

Those who entered first the little tent, found the body fallen on the rock. The head was bent to the side, so that the candle light still fell upon a portion of the face. The large mouth was partly open, the thin lips distorted. Some of the blood was on the blue-black of the chin, and a pool of it, spreading over the rock, still caught the drops as they trickled from the wound.

They laid him on the ground and covered him with garments of their own, crossing themselves. In a sort of panic, then, they hastily withdrew, knocking down the candle as they went, and putting out its light. So he lay there alone, a thing without form.

## CHAPTER XVII

**T**HE sheriff's party gathered at length about Mathilde, over against the eastern cliff. They stood in a circle and looked at her, it may have been in fascination and awe, or it may have been in the silent presage of fanatical hate. Mathilde was guarded carefully by the sheriff himself and deputies, standing before her ready to quell any outbreak. She was looking at the ground, her form erect. She seemed unconscious of place and time. The last light of the moon ascended and climbed the eastern wall above her head. Had the wall been away, the dim whiteness of the east would have told of the coming morning.

The men grew restless; the little crowd, still watching Mathilde, stirred in its midst, circling somewhat within itself, whispering.

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It was like a deep pool disturbed by an undercurrent. The whispers became murmurs and the sheriff saw the danger of another attack upon Mathilde. The hate of a holy war is perhaps the deepest of all hate. Here was incarnate damnation; the fiend who had let hell loose in the midst of the sanctuary—spilled the blood of the man of God; and she stood there silent against the cliff.

“Kill her! Kill her!” cried the voice of one more fierce than the rest. The murmur became boisterous discord at once, and an unequal attack, disconcerted and soon stopped, was made upon the sheriff and his men. The officer fired a shot over their heads, and, gaining an instant’s comparative silence, spoke.

“Leave her alone,” he cried gruffly. “Haven’t you got her safe enough? Don’t waste your time and energy on her. Go for the devils up the cañon. We’ll all be murdered next; go for them!”

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The suggestion became a purpose among them all; and with the purpose there was born a desperation, almost a frenzy, such as neither previous attack had shown.

It was with the utmost difficulty that the sheriff could restrain them until a little light should render the attack less uncertain. Finally some small portion of the day filtered through the cañon, and hastily the men were formed. Being reduced in number, they made a single line. A deputy remained to watch Mathilde. Jimpse was guarded some fifty yards down the cañon.

There was still almost darkness, yet mingled somewhat with the gray of dawn. Like wolves they bounded up the rocky chasm toward the barricade. As they ran, the form of a man arose before them, staggered, moved with them, and fell to the ground. It was one of their own number, wounded the day before, having lain all night.

They were within range of the barricaders'

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weapons. Here where the cliffs were close the night was but little gone, so that those who attacked held, in the approach, the advantage. There was no lack of readiness behind the stones. The line of lead came singing through the air. One of the tallest of the charging body, immediately beside the sheriff, threw up his arms and fell flat. Another staggered but still came on. Ten yards before the barricade; the line of lead came singing from the stones again. Three of the attacking line fell out.

But there was now no wavering; desperation had grown as mad before, as ever it had been behind, the barricade. The force of hate bore them on like some mastering spirit. With a yell of rage they leaped upon the rocks and up the sides to the top. The first that gained the summit of the fort were killed on the instant, falling some on the stones, some among the attacked. The next were there at once, crowding on, seeming, to

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the barricaders in the gloom, limitless in numbers. The battle was indiscriminate and confused. Yelling men leaping behind the barricade, pierced men falling over the rocks, mad men lunging with broken bayonets at forms but indistinctly seen; and always the ring of shots, the curses of the wounded.

In Patricio the savage blood was boiling. The men were upon and in the fort, around and over him, so that he must fight with all his power and every instant. Antonio was beside him firing till his weapon was empty.

"Durant! Durant!" he cried shrilly.

Durant and Salazar had barely time to leave the right and run to block the center with the brothers. Already all but two of the Mexicans upon the left had fallen, the attack being more vigorous upon that side. Patricio and Durant held the two rifles. Salazar and Antonio had revolvers only. The two Mexicans on the left went down. All





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the weapons were now empty. Swinging them about like battle-axes and with the despair of death, the four remaining men closed up.

The fight had become fearfully unequal. Those of the sheriff's party who remained unwounded were at last upon or over the barricade. Salazar found himself struggling in the arms of a lean and strong antagonist. He gathered his strength for a final effort, but could not tear himself away. He was bent to the ground and killed. The little Mexican died without a groan.

Slowly giving way step by step, the three backed toward the right wall of the cañon. Nearly all the weapons, too, of the sheriff and his men were now empty. It was a fight of physical strength and agility. Pressing on, the pursuers felt the dear-bought victory within their grasp. But the triumph was anticipated. Here with the wall at their backs and the three of them still unharmed, An-

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tonio to guard the right, Durant and Patricio the left and center, the position was more tenable. So furiously did the guns of the two last come down on those who would have pressed against them, that the attack was balked and rendered for a moment weak.

Even under like inspiration there was not a man of the opposing party whose strength could equal three-fourths of that of Patricio. As it was, fighting under the last strain, his power seemed that of twenty men. To Durant, there was nothing now in all the earth but a wild bitterness that these devils before him had captured Mathilde, and that he had failed. His love had given birth in him to rage like the rage of a tiger. Every breath he drew was the agony of her.

Antonio, though now as always cooler than the others, was least effective in his defense for lack of a suitable weapon. The revolver alone was in his hand. The guns of

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the others, wheeling about his head, were as yet holding the enemy at bay. Nettled at his own inability, he lunged suddenly forward. A pistol in the hands of a deputy flashed fire in his eyes. Some strange freak of fate rendered inaccurate the aim. The bullet passed him. Throwing himself at his antagonist, Antonio saw Durant's gun, whirled in a circle, falling harmless. Indistinctly, as in fog, he beheld Durant sink forward. The ball had entered the priest's shoulder. He fell silently, turned slowly on his back, seemed to be crushed into himself, his face, sickly pale, toward the sky.

"Dead!" gasped Patricio. "Close up! It is hell with us at last!"

In an instant the fallen gun was in Antonio's hands. It descended like a bar of lead on his antagonist. The deputy was slain. Leaping back, Antonio was close at his brother's side; but the struggle was nearing its end. Their enemies, compact once more,

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with the sheriff at their head, hurled themselves in a body against the two. They had all long since recognized Patricio, knowing him for the object of their hate. By some means the murderer was at this attack forced away from his brother by the distance of two yards. He stood against the rock, his face luminous with insanity, seeing death at hand. His last blow, delivered with a mighty swing of his gun and accompanied by his last hoarse cry, cut through the sheriff's mob like sharp steel.

Immediately a counter gun-stroke upon Patricio's chest knocked him to his knee. Antonio's blows were at last ineffectual. The sheriff himself sprang upon the sinking Patricio, grasped him about the arms, was joined at once by others, forced him to the ground, and pinioned him. It took five men to hold him. They would have killed him at once had not the officers pleaded and threatened, had not the frenzy of the attack

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begun to diffuse in sickness and weariness, and had there not still continued the struggle with Antonio.

The latter, after a final reckless charge straight at the mob that held his brother, saw the uselessness of it. It came over him on the instant that he was bound to this course no more, that he alone, of all the girl's friends, remained. Flight was the single thing that left her any hope. The hour for the revolution in Antonio had struck. Defeat, sure, inevitable, was at hand. His brother must perish. His soul's intensest strength could avail no more. The scene before him floated away, a mist from his eyes. He flung his weapon with stupendous fury among his enemies. He turned, all thoughts, all feeling, save for Ramoncita, banished from him. In separating him from Patricio and pressing on the latter, those who attacked had left Antonio a space for flight along the cliff wall. He bounded

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up the cañon. The very sky seemed bright with a new and flaming brilliancy. This desertion of his brother made him free.

Running over the rocks he cleared the first three hundred yards of the gorge. Those behind began the pursuit, but such as were not occupied with Patricio were few and sickened with blood. A hundred yards they followed, panting and thirsty, like spent dogs. Bewildered, weapons empty, they saw with amazement that his speed tripled theirs. Some stumbled with fatigue, passion having flickered and gone out, a dead flame. Weariness fell on them, revulsion against conflict. He was leaping yonder before them. They strained heavy limbs and pushed on. He turned the cliff's angle and disappeared. Discouragement, or relief, halted them. Why pursue? The world already ran thick and sickening with blood. The murderer was captured. Here in their grasp was the

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source of the struggle; let that other damned, enchanted coward go.

The fugitive, wheeling the slight angle, came like a deer amidst the pines. She lay there wrapped in a garment of Mathilde's, not unconscious, staring down the gorge, listening, with strained, flushed face of pain. He bounded to her, hungry-eyed, and caught her up. He clutched her to his breast, and she settled there in silence. He sprang on, scarcely conscious of that new weight, the cañon floor flying beneath his feet, the accursed pass sinking farther and farther below him. She was in his arms at last.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**H**IGH up, near that spot where the advancing trail surmounts the summits, below which the distant pass is but a shadowed crevice, came Antonio. The morning sun, brilliant, pouring yellow light lavishly over the great waste, lit his rugged features, his striding form, and his burden. He carried the girl.

To the right, away from the trail, stretched a sea of mountain tops like monstrous blue-black billows frozen; a trackless ocean of rocks and cliffs and pine-clad promontories, where for miles none but the hardest of human beings ventured; where the eye in ranging over vast stretches found only new fastnesses, new solitudes, new temples of some fierce and ancient god; on to a horizon whose line was rocky billows still.

Antonio turned into a rugged descent, over

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neck-breaking stones. Her head with its tangled blackness of hair was on his shoulder. She was very light. He did not notice fatigue; his thoughts were on the burden in his arms.

She was not unconscious, though weak; and only at times did she open her eyes. A bright flush was on the cheeks and forehead, though the mouth was drawn. He set his jaws, looked from her to the path, and from the path to her again, and strode on.

An hour passed, and they seemed buried in infinite solitude. They were following no marked trail, and only unerring instinct led him. Where three towering boulders, their bases buried in vegetation, stood shouldering one another, he first halted. There was a spring of water running from them. He laid her on the ground. She seemed very slender. The flush had momentarily left the face. It came over him once again that she was not living, and dread, increased a thou-

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sand-fold, now that he alone held her, gripped his heart. Slowly, with a certain feeling of reverence, he loosened the dress and unbound the wound. He had seen wounds like that. He believed he could save her, for she stirred. Deep exultation, a joy all the more consuming because of its pain, sprang up again in him. He felt mighty, with the strength of a giant. For she who lay there, dependent on him alone, was so frail, so near to death. He washed the wound and bound it up.

He rested only a little; his haste was her life. He drank deeply from the spring and stooped to lift her. Her eyes were staring into his, pain in them.

"Antonio," she said.

Passionately he raised her, and strode on. She settled in his arms.

"I am taking you where there is safety," he replied. "Do not speak. Do not think."

She lay still for a long time.

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"They were all killed," murmured she, at a time when he thought her unconscious.

He said nothing.

The hours wore on. That great labor only steeled his soul to bear it through. It was the true expression of his love. Over the ruggedest of ways, down treacherous declines, climbing toilsome ascents, struggling on, he yet burned with the inspiration of the deed. A mother carrying her first-born from fire or flood could not have borne on more ceaselessly, more longingly. The spirit of Antonio was strong.

She lay, as though in a reverie, her eyes still fixed on him. The flush had come again to her face. He knew the signs of fever, saw it burning her, perceived its treacherous brilliance in her eyes. He ground his teeth, held her more closely in his arms, and climbed on.

In the early afternoon, after hours of this perilous and strange course, he came to the

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top of a perpendicular cliff, but a hundred feet in height, stopped and looked over the edge.

Below was a hollow basin, surrounded on all sides by cliffs, pines growing in a stunted circle about the bases. In the bottom the blue sky, with the sun lying bright in its center, was reflected from the depths of water, which seemed deep, and dark, and still, lying like some silent, all-wise eye in the heart of solitude; the cliffs its socket, the sky its wisdom.

She stirred a little in his arms.

"Put me down," she said gently. "You must rest. Let me die, Antonio; let me die. I was a bad girl, Antonio; it isn't worth while."

"Ramoncita, I would walk thus through hell. I am going to carry you down into this hole for water."

"Leave me—and go alone!" she cried.

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He made no answer. He came to a fissure in the rocks, whence a winding descent was possible. Gathering her more tightly to his breast, he descended. A half hour brought him to the socket's bottom and the tiny lake. Buried in that well-like depression, shadowed, sunk in a silence profound, he laid her again upon the ground. Water yet more revived her.

"Sit down, Antonio; sit down with Ramoncita. Antonio, why do *you* do all this? It isn't worth while." Her eyes, deep, were on him.

He sat down. Her head rested on his knee.

"Because," said he simply, "if you die, I too shall die."

She lay and dreamed.

"If I had died," murmured she at length, "while you carried me here, what would you have done with me then?"

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He bent over her, holding her again in his arms.

"I should have buried you here, Ramoncita—here in this lake, that neither man nor beast should ever see you more, and Antonio alone should know."

She closed her eyes.

"Antonio."

"Yes."

"I wonder what makes—what makes you—like me."

"O Ramoncita! Ramoncita!" he cried.

A pause.

"Antonio."

"Yes—tell me!"

"You don't seem like the same old lazy Antonio."

"Why?"

"You seem—you seem—different."

He said nothing, but watched her face.

"Different," said she.

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"Ramoncita, it is the world that has changed."

"You loved—Mathilde," said she sorrowfully.

"I thought so; but I did not love her. My God!—Mathilde!"

"What did they do to her?" weakly.

"I do not know. I think they took her back to Santa Fé. All that is done. For us, forever, the life behind is dead. Ramoncita, a new life has begun—for you. For me it began before. You shall not die. You have made me over. My heart lay idle, waiting for you. My days were empty. The sun was only the sun, and the world but rocks and earth. What was life or anything to me, till I found at last this that I needed? I was a wanderer, Ramoncita, and lost."

"And—then?"

His voice broke; his head sank to his hand.

"With all my soul I love you!"

There was silence. He was trembling. He

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lifted his head and looked at her. Her eyes, more strangely brilliant still, were looking deeply into his. He covered her hot face with sudden, unrestrained kisses.

She smiled, and he started up, holding her. He saw the hot flush increased upon her face. With a pang he perceived that she lay unconscious. He gathered her again to his breast, stared at the light of the advancing sun, shook his passionate dream from him, and climbed the cliffs.

All the long afternoon he plunged on midst mountains. Sorrow, heavy, fierce, fell on him. Yearning over her, he beheld the fever's progress. Toward evening, he staggered. The infinite solitude became a presence, as of some mighty spirit, which weighed upon him. Rocks and trees were cruel enemies who hurled resistance in his way. He clung to her; he pressed her more tightly yet, as though he strove to pour his life from his own body into hers. At times

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he ran, where the way permitted, fiercely. He called to heaven.

The night came down. Miles of all but superhuman toil were behind him. At dusk he entered a high and lonely grove of pines, with a smooth floor of fallen needles. He laid her beneath a tree, as darkness came.

She slept. The fever seemed not to be increasing. He knelt over her for an hour, unconsciously rubbing a slender hand. He lost all sense of time, of place, became for an instant delirious with grief. He kissed her face in the darkness, and yet again, many times. She did not awake. He arose and strode to and fro beside her, and cursed God and tore his heart in anguish. Returned to himself, he came and lay down beside her. The night air was chill. He felt her cheeks, and the heat had gone. He listened and heard her heart. He drew her to him tenderly, and warmed her small body with his own mighty one. Throughout the

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hours, marked by the slow, inscrutable procession of the stars, the night wind sighed gently in swaying pines, and no sleep came to him.

At the first approach of dawn he took her up and recommenced his journey. At length, looking away across a limitless expanse of mountain and desert, he saw the sun's ball roll up, red from a misty horizon. Its light fell on her face, whose features were in repose. As he hastened on, her lips moved. He believed she fancied herself singing.

She lay limp in his arms, a fragile thing. Let him hold her life a few hours longer, and he should reach safety. His speed to-day was increased. His weariness of body, though great, in itself nerved him to mightier efforts. The summits lay behind him, a dread nightmare. The descent, long and difficult, passed away beneath his feet.

Not many miles from the region where the far side of the mountains begins to give

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way to *mesas* and foothills, which in turn lead into deserts again, there stood a small hut among the heights. The spot was wild. The house was extremely rude, made partly of pine limbs, partly of earth.

The trail leading away to the front wound among lower heights and *mesas*, into those other deserts, in a direction opposite to that which would have brought the traveler to Santa Fé. To the rear there was little enough trail of any kind. There were no other houses within a radius of twenty miles, few even then. The hut was occupied by a hunter and prospector, Juan Chiquito, a man of eccentric manner, living for some reason known only to himself, hidden away from civilization. In spite of his name, which was probably not his own, he was not a Mexican. With him lived a withered Indian doctor, and the latter's wife and son.

To this spot came Antonio, haggard, his limp burden in his arms.

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"Put her on the bed," said Juan calmly, gazing on the girl and pointing to the first room.

When she lay there the Indian was called. He dressed the wound afresh.

"It is nothing," mumbled he. "She will soon be well."

Later, the story of the fight was related. At night Chiquito departed. He was going back to the pass, that Patricio or Durant, in case they had escaped, might perchance be discovered, wounded or exhausted, wandering in the mountains, and brought thither.

Antonio bent over the bed of the girl. Exhaustion was now sweeping down upon him. Her lips still moved. He leaned closer; she was whispering the song.

## CHAPTER XIX

**D**URANT lay on the rocks, and they thought him dead. The slain were about him. The victors had no means of transporting those silent ones to Sante Fé. Few were those of the sheriff's party left in health to take charge even of the conquered living. The dead must lie and wait.

The priest did not know how long he had been insensible, when consciousness slowly returned. He awoke from a great silence, from a state of dreamlessness. He heard the sheriff's voice. He lay wondering idly, not caring to open his eyes.

His consciousness was suddenly assaulted by a pang, and throbs from his hand to his shoulder. He awoke and heard again the sheriff's voice. He began to understand.

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"We must leave the dead," said the sheriff. "There are scarce horses enough for the living."

Realizing the truth of defeat, Durant began to understand his only chance of safety. He felt the loss of blood and knew that he might die lying thus. Yet to move was to be taken. Perhaps no other friend of Mathilde remained uncaptured. To lie without motion until they should have gone—even though he be left wounded and alone—might yet save him. Then—though the hope was forlorn and pale—some fatality might lead him to her, might once again lend him strength for her assistance. Exhaustion alone would have made motion all but impossible, had it not been for his thoughts, the constant jangle of memories and emotions. These made silence a gigantic task.

For more than an hour of such agony that all previous suffering seemed faint, he

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heard and felt about him the progress of the last scenes of the tragedy.

Day had dawned. The sunlight, lying clear upon the cliffs, made the upper and lower portions of the cañon bright. At the pass the cliff's shadow was deeper; yet the day was there. One of the victorious was returning from the lower cañon; the sheriff and his men were still knotted about the cliff. Patricio, mastered as a mountain lion might be mastered, lay there in the midst of them, held down. He who had come up the cañon climbed the barricade and brought handcuffs to the officers. A moment more and Patricio was on his feet. He stood quietly.

There were two others coming up the cañon. They arrived at the barricade. He knew that one was she, for he heard her single word of reply to some command. She came and stood near him, guarded. For a second the fury seized him to leap up, rush

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upon them, and rescue her or let them kill him as he tried. His power to crush himself and lie still, though strained, yet conquered. He must wait. The pang in his arm was fiercer.

Mathilde was speaking to the sheriff. She asked only that Ramoncita might be carried back with her. A man went to search, returned, and reported that the wounded girl was gone. Mathilde was silent. Durant imagined her as she stood. How well he knew the calm poise of the head, the eyes.

There was made a hasty search among the wounded for such as might be able to make the journey back. One or two were lifted to their feet and partly restored. Many yards up the gorge and against the western wall were some horses of the fugitives still standing tied. Two of them had been killed by random shots, three had broken away and gone galloping up the cañon. A deputy came and took all the others and led them to

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the barricade. A part of the defense that had made this bloody slaughter possible, was torn down, so that the animals were led through.

There was a final parley at the opening. One came and stood over Durant, touched him with his foot, called him dead. The sheriff discussed the possibility of overtaking Antonio. His men doggedly refused the attempt. All appeared at length satisfied with blood and capture. There was too much here to attend to, and too few of them left to attend to it.

They went marching down, leaving the slain lying here and there upon the rocks. Far down the stream they halted again where there were other horses and two other men. All mounted; the handcuffed ones, being now three instead of two, were placed carefully in the front.

So they went away at last, down along the cliff's bare base. For a long time Du-

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rant heard no more. His heart, oppressed with failure, leaped to follow. Yet—to guard himself, to effect his escape, to fight with a renewed fury the battle with this wound and weakness, to crush out the fever which he felt approaching; to seek her then again, after the victory; this was his course.

Until he believed the rock wall must have shut them away, he waited; thinking but the one thing, that he would give his life as he had risked it these two days, to comfort her; now in the long agony to be the peace and rest that she had never known. He wondered over and over again, as she rode away, whether there was in her heart any sense of reliance on his love—if merely the fact of it gave her anything in life or death to hold to.

He staggered to his feet. The pain of his wound was increased a hundred fold. Dizzily he leaned against the wall. He gained a little strength and looked about him. He was alone, save for the dead and

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two wounded members of the sheriff's party who, dying, lay by the stream. He was an uncanny figure, wild-eyed, earth and powder stained, his clothing torn, his arm hanging useless. He made his slow way to the stream, washed and bound up his wound as best he could.

Half dazed, he knelt by his two wounded enemies. He gave them water, served them a little. They were beyond his help. Soul-sick, the memory of Mathilde the only reality in his brain, he went unsteadily up the cañon.

Antonio had described to him the course across the mountains to the hut. Though he despaired of finding it alone, thither he went.

He was a fugitive, a murderer. Loss of blood seemed wrecking him. He paused, when he had laboriously ascended a few yards, put his hand confusedly to his head, and felt the heat. From this on, as the hours

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passed, the fever grew. At first it lent him strength. Motion called forth power in his limbs; he went on. His brain was not clear. He paused again when he had ascended the gorge a little farther. He turned a bloodshot eye on all the cliffs and back to the pass. He glared at the distant slain. All was silent, dead, given up to unspeaking Nature. Humanity had no more to do with this, nor with him. He passed his one manageable hand across his eyes again; he felt unutterably weary, and lonely beyond the belief of man.

After this, fever working in him, he could move with more alacrity. He toiled for hours. At midday he turned away from the trail's high summit, remembering Antonio's directions. Into that wilderness of rock he plunged, not quite despairing, yet seeing the all but hopelessness of threading this unknown way; the love of Mathilde holding his purpose ever before him, so that,

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at his weakest moment, he clenched his hands and swore that, wander for days if he must, the fever should not overthrow him.

And now the hours were confused. He knew them no more. Life was a fearful labyrinth of rocks and pain and despair. Time was sunk in oblivion. Heat was the source of a grinding and inevitable power. To stagger was yet to proceed. To plunge on was to come yet nearer to Mathilde. The day went by. Infinite miles of nothingness, deserted of God himself, lay on all sides of him. There was no day nor night—only a red flame that lit the uncertain way. At times he knew that it was dark. At times he recognized the sun. When years seemed to have dragged themselves over him, he found himself, scorched with thirst, at a cliff's summit. He looked and beheld the glimmer of water in the deep socket beneath. He fell on his knees, peering into the depths.

Having lain there long, he heard a shout.

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He did not heed. The loud halloo of a hunter echoed through the pines. It was all dreams to him. Striding on in the early morning sunlight, came Juan, the searcher. He saw Durant and ran forward. He found the priest, lying like a human wreck, flat on the cliff's summit, his head hanging over, glazed eyes watching the distant water. He dragged him back; half consciousness returned. The priest muttered and stood up. The unspeakable horror of his two days' wanderings gaped from his face.

## CHAPTER XX

**T**HERE was a straggling crowd of men, women, and children in a narrow street four blocks from the plaza. The sun came into the street a little hazily to-day. So many days it had been bright, perhaps it grew weary of the bareness of this great bare territory, the brownness of adobe houses. At all events it looked through a whitish haze and cast listless shadows on the cobble-stones of the narrow street.

There was never a breeze anywhere. The mountains, too, had turned against the town and sent their breath in other directions. The row of low, irregular adobe shops and houses joined together on the shady side, glowered dully, ill-humoredly, at the row of adobe shops and houses staring into it from the sunny side. They were so close together

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and stared so constantly, the one straight into the other, they must have communicated their dullness the one to the other ; they must have fostered phlegmatic ill-nature by this proximity, and longed to come closer still and bump clumsily into each other.

The children, coming and going in the street and standing in a straggling crowd in and out of a square and ancient door, cared little for the ill-humor of the walls. There was ill-humor enough there now and then, because they could not all get in ; and some pushing and swearing, and a fight or two. The sombreroed men crowded out the ragged women, and the ragged women wondered how the black-eyed boys and girls had got so much nearer than they. The room within seemed to be full, and the ancient door frame itself was so put to it to hold its occupants that it felt its hundred years sit wretchedly upon its ribs, and stood slanting at the top,

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as though one withered shoulder were paralyzed under its earthen burden.

The crowd without was thinner, more restless, being unable to see the proceedings. They jostled each other over the cobblestones and moved about and speculated. Not hearing the things said within, they broke out and said things on their own account, and laughed uproariously in one or two cases, and cursed Spanish oaths with frequency.

A Mexican youth with very slouchy clothing and a vacant look like the look of an idiot, came driving a burro. The animal had to crowd against the sunny side and be much beaten before he could pass. Getting him past, the Mexican boy stopped on the outskirts of the crowd and looked wonderingly, his mouth hanging open.

"What's the matter?" he said.

Everybody near him stared at him. Two

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women, one with a dirty baby on her shoulder, tittered a little.

"Why, it's the trial, of course!" said a broad-hipped *vaquero*, spitting a flood of tobacco juice and eying the boy contemptuously.

"Oh!" said the boy in a bewildered manner.

He peered over the heads of the crowd through the door but could see nothing. There was some one talking loudly within. He sidled up to the *vaquero*.

"What's it—what's it for?"

The *vaquero* looked about upon his neighbors in stunned surprise.

"Well, thunder!" he said, as though it were the last possible thing to ask. Those near continued to stare with some listless wonder.

"Why, where in the devil have you been?" said the *vaquero*, chewing largely, his hands thrust into his pockets.

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"He's cracked in the head," volunteered a small shop-keeper. "Can't you see? *He* don't know."

"Well it's the ones that murdered the priests—that's what it's for," said the *vaquero*.

"Oh!" said the idiot, still bewildered.

"Why, yes; thunder, haven't you heard it? Here—damn you, here's a paper with it in," thrusting it at him ferociously, frightening him; "look at it—there it is: 'Patricio Borrego, Sofia Borrego, William Jimpse, and the girl called Mathilde.' Thunder, you know 'em! You know old Jimpse, sure—Bill Jimpse? Old Bill Jimpse?"

"Oh!" said the idiot vacantly; "Bill Jimpse."

"Hu!" grunted the *vaquero*, turning away in disgust, "captured a week ago and it aint through his head yet, and the town full of it ever since. Why, say!" turning about to the boy again in irritated inability to let the

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subject drop, "didn't you know about the fight,—regular war; and a devil of a sight killed? Didn't you know that—eh?"

The idiot shrank back in much apologetic concern.

"Oh!" he said, "fight—oh yes—devil of a sight killed!"

The *vaquero* grunted again and moved to another part of the crowd. Seeing him gone the boy hastily got himself away, found the burro with his head in a deserted doorway, and went beating him out of sight.

Within there were brass knobs on a rack that was long ago made for a lamp. The knobs, bald, shining but little, stood up at the edge of the judge's desk. One of the side-whiskers of the judge sometimes touched one of the balls as he leaned over the desk. The desk itself was old and black and scarred. The room all about was old and black and scarred also. There had been a kind of white plaster over the adobe walls,

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but it had, for the most part, fallen off. A piece of it hung loosely above the judge, but even that was far from white. A clerk of marked thinness and sallowness sat chewing a pen and looking over the people sitting, standing, crowding against the walls.

Down in front beside a table, old and scarred also, were the lawyers, leaning back in ancient chairs, silent. By a battered pillar in a row sat Patricio Borrego, Sofia Borrego, William Jimpse, and, at a very little distance by herself, the girl called Mathilde. The thing was nearly over; the jury was out.

Through windows back of the judge and the clerk came the hazy sunlight and lay meagerly on the desk and what little of the floor it could find, and discovered the gray hairs in the side-whiskers of the judge. It found one long hand of Patricio stretched out upon his knee, and lay over the fingers that did not move; the rest of him was in the shadow. It did not find Mr. Jimpse; it

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would not have lain so still upon him if it had. Floating to the other side of Patricio, close to him it found Sofia—all of her—and stayed longer there; lay over the dress across the knees; over the arms, thin; over the shoulders, seeming very narrow and stooped again. It lay with much more meaning on the face, and spread itself to all the lineaments that made the strain of the expression. It scrupled not to enter the depth of the furrow between the eyes, nor be a living part of the intensity of the eyes themselves, where lay the racked look, the silence of the latent insanity. It would have searched out also the girl, but the window-side shut her away. She was in the shadow.

The crowd had refused to go. *Dios!* could there be but one kind of verdict, and would it take jurymen five minutes to come to it? There was nothing to do, meanwhile, but stare at the four, or rather at the two, Patricio and Mathilde.

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Chiefly was the staring at the girl called Mathilde. There was some fascination in watching her. If one eye-lid raised in the faintest fraction of a movement, the crowd saw it. In the stillness some one chanced to push himself against a fat butcher with a red face, so that the butcher's elbow went through a pane of the window against which he was crowded. There was a crash and the glass fell clattering. Nobody laughed or noticed it, more than to turn the eyes in that direction a moment. None of the four moved at all.

Ten minutes had passed and the crowd was a little restless, yet merely in the breathing and in silent shifting. Fifteen minutes and there were black looks. The knob of a door at the side of the judge turned a little and squeaked. Everybody but the four watched it; it was still again. It turned once more, the door opened, and the jury came out. There were six Mexicans and six

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men of a variety of nationalities. In general they were uncouth. They sat down; the foreman presented the verdict.

There had somehow entered into the minds of the jury some spark of knowledge of the love of a mother and a wife. Whether the almost ghastly strain of the countenance, seen thus hour after hour, had made the spark penetrative; whether the knowledge lay plain in the wrinkle on the forehead; whether something in the stoniness of the silence brought it home; some of the Mexicans and the indiscriminate others, though they were men—men, mind you, and God help us, how many men know anything about that love!—had had it beaten into them that there is a thing called mercy. Yet that, too, is taking much for granted; for there was no evidence at any time against Sofia Borregö. As for William Jimpse, there was none but that he had run

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away and had been behind the barricade. Sofia and Jimpse were acquitted.

A murmur began to go through the crowd, but it gave way to intense silence again on the instant. The hazy sunlight was still lying on Patricio's hand and covering the immovable Sofia, when the death penalty was finally pronounced upon Borrego and the girl called Mathilde.

Yet the crowd did not move away. The four sat still as always. Two jailers came and touched Patricio and Mathilde upon the arms and had them up. The girl had nothing in her appearance in any way different from that which had been in it when she had first come into the court room. On Patricio's face there was returning something of the wildness that had caused it all. As though in a dream he walked with the jailer and the girl to the door; and as they went out, the crowd saw that Mathilde was close to him and held his hand in her own.

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There was some angry glaring at Sofia and Jimpse, as the crowd began to depart. They were silent at first, looking back at times but talking only in whispers. Outside they became clamorous, gathering in knots, dispersing slowly, discussing the whole upon the cobble-stones and against the walls.

Finally within there was nobody left but Sofia and Jimpse, and the sallow clerk who still sat and chewed his pen. Jimpse got up and moved heavily about. There was no movement from Sofia. She was staring in front of her. Jimpse came a little nearer and looked helplessly from her to the door, and from the door to her again. His old air of weak consciousness of responsibility was upon him. At length, in a kind of dull panic, he got to the door and went into the street and the crowd.

There was nobody now, save the thin clerk and the woman. The thin clerk chewed his pen, looking very cynical and dyspeptic. Af-

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ter several minutes he got up and went to the woman. She had not moved.

"You're free, you know," he said.

She made no reply.

"Why, you know you can go—it's done, you know. You can get out."

Still she made no move nor answer. The dyspeptic clerk scratched his head with the pen and chewed at the holder. Having stood thus a moment, he tried it again.

"We're going to lock up, you know; say, you're all right; you're free—*ad infinitum*—loose. You can go," stooping down toward her and speaking as though she were very deaf; "you can *go*."

She did not look at him nor give any evidence that she had heard, but after a moment, more like a ghost than a woman, she arose, walked to the slanting door, slowly, and went out into the street; and the court room was locked.

She was bewildered, standing there on the

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cobble-stones, and stared at the hazy sunlight on the wall across. She did not know where to go. Some of the crowd, not yet having dispersed, perceived her as she stood. There was an irregular shout, attracting attention to her, which she did not seem to hear. Some men came nearer and watched her. A few stood in silence, a few threatened, a few made obscene jests. She became conscious of this and turned away, walking stooped, and went down the street over the cobble-stones.

Others of the crowd had come up, and two of them threw some pebbles and dirt after her. A little clod struck the dress near the bottom and left a dust mark on it. Walking on a block or two, seeing nothing but the cobble-stones and the hazy sunlight, seeming to know nothing, she turned a corner into a narrower and much dingier street, deserted, dirty, shaded by low sheds that stood out from the houses.

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She halted again, rubbing her forehead, seeming to have forgotten. Then she sat down by a wooden post that supported rotten timbers of a shed. With the same strained expression she looked only at the dirt of the street. The sun did not come here; it lay yonder at a distance on the cobble-stones. After many minutes some one pulled her gently by the sleeve from behind. She took no notice of it at first but, the pulling being a third time repeated, she turned her blank face. Jimpse was standing there, puffing.

"Come on; you must git up. I'll go along," he said.

He repeated this several times before she obeyed.

"I know you're miserable," he said. "I'm that-a-way myself. But of course you're worse; it's a heap worse fer you than fer me, but fer me it's bad enough."

He prevailed upon himself awkwardly to take her arm. She had seemed scarcely to

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know him, but went with him. They walked toward the lower end of San Francisco Street, avoiding the plaza. They passed the idiot boy, who was standing against a wall under one of the sheds. It was in a species of desperation that Mr. Jimpse talked without ceasing. He wondered why she did not answer.

"I wanted to go with you from the first, right after it, and help you come out, and all; but I seen you feelin' so bad and I somehow had to leave you alone. Maybe 'twasn't the thing—was it?"

She did not answer.

"No, it wasn't. Miserable again. Now you see—now you see how it is! O Lord! if I could ever git cured. I don't do nothin' in the right way, somehow—feel heavy and not capable. You understand how it is?"

He was actually perspiring because she did not speak; he went on.

"But it looks like it wasn't eatin' too

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much. W'y, I aint hed enough. No, not fer two weeks. Seems ten—seems a year. Seems ten years, by the mass, seems *ten years!* But not eatin' enough is worse than the eatin'. I never knowed it till I had to try it that first time—that night that—that night I let—. O Lord!"

His extreme misery was pitiable. He looked at her, and fearfully away, and at her again, and puffed and wheezed. As for her, one would have thought she did not know that he was there.

"W'y say, you needn't be takin' it so. Cheer up! You're let out of it, clean. A man with more head than I've got would say somethin' to you that would fix it, I know. I'd do it quick enough if I knowed. What *can* I say? I'm willin'. I couldn't say nothin' actual happy, maybe—it wouldn't be happy noways, if I did. I figger it out happy, and it looks worse than if I'd let it

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alone; fer I know very well you can't make it right. My head aint clear."

Silence a moment, as they walked on.

"You know me—you know Jimpse—eh? Sure, you know Bill Jimpse!"

He could elicit no response.

"W'y, I'd do anything. Always was willin' enough—only tied up somehow. W'y, I've got a heart. Yes sir—Jimpse has got a heart. Never done nothin' with it, but it's there jist the same."

Understanding the hopelessness of it at last, he merely walked at her side, unhappy, repeating to himself now and then in a necessary assurance:

"It's there jist the same—yes, sir—it's there jist the same."

They came to the house where the baby had died. They did not see the figure of the boy, who slipped by the corner as they entered. Within, they found it very bare as always, and deserted. Still seeming to see

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nothing at all she walked into the rear room and stood without motion near the bed. It was perhaps well that no one could see the face, not even Mr. Jimpse, who stood behind her in the doorway. Jimpse saw after a time that the shoulders were a little straighter and the form a little more erect. She turned slowly and looked at him.

"I had thought of everything but this," she said. "But I never once thought of this."

The despair in the words was complete.

"We bore the first of it here together—right here. I'd like to die with him, Jimpse; I'd like to. Why—I never thought of this. I didn't want to be set free. I'd rather go to hell with him than stay here or go to heaven without him."

She lay down on the bed. Jimpse, confused, hurried away to find the old Mexican women, and soon returned with two of them. The other had long since yielded to the pressure of opinion, had crossed herself de-

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voutly, shaken the dust of the place from her feet, and departed forever, taking the sniffling girl with her. The two made Sofia more nearly comfortable upon the bed, and set about getting some nourishment for her. Jimpse stood all the while in the doorway. In the course of an hour he turned and went laboriously away, muttering something to himself. Having come to his own home, he sat down in deep meditation, muttering still.

After a long time his cook, or his housekeeper, or his sister, or whoever it was that cared for the bodily wants of Mr. Jimpse, learning the issue of the trial, came and fed him till he could eat no more. And during all that interminable meal she could hear him muttering the something over and over again. When he had finished he got himself upon a bed and fell into a slumber which, it was afterward related in the neighborhood, lasted three and thirty hours. And in the midst of it the cook, or the housekeeper, or

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the sister, or whoever she was, going on tip-toe so that her very large and clattering shoes might not awaken him, stooped with her ear to his lips, her unkempt hair tickling his cheek, and heard him muttering still:

“It’s there jist the same—it’s there jist the same.”

## CHAPTER XXI

**A**T ten o'clock that night Sofia lifted herself from the bed. She had not undressed. One of the old women had departed. The other having pondered long and noddingly as to what she should do, had finally fallen asleep in her chair and let nature solve the problem for her. Her heavy breathing was the only sound that marred the stillness. A very short candle burned on the table.

Sofia stood for a moment before the woman and seemed to watch her intently, though in truth she hardly knew of her presence. She turned about and scanned the room a moment more, and in particular the bed. She came to the front of the house and stepped out into the night, leaving the door open behind her. There was no thought in this, it was but the result of grief. She

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could not stay inside—the open air—the darkness of the night—anything.

She had thrown a worn black shawl over her. It was the only thing in the nature of a wrap she had. It was about her shoulders only and her head was bare. She paused outside, not knowing where to turn. She looked up once at the stars, the same that had been so inscrutable when Antonio had looked up at them once before and wondered what babies are. She did not see the figure of the idiot boy as he stood in the shadow across the street.

She went on, walking much as though in sleep. Daylight would have shown the intense expression again, and much depth of the furrow. After a circuitous route among crooked streets and deserted alleys, and after pausing many times and resting in corners against adobe walls, she came to the jail.

The building stood in an outlying quarter; it was dark all about save for one smoky

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oil lamp at a distance casting a very little light. The walls were stone. A black alley led from the street along the side to the jailer's door in the rear. As she passed the corner, going in, she had some confused consciousness of the figure of the boy crouching against the wall. She took no notice but groped her way. Her hands, passing over the stones, touched the wood of a door tightly shut.

She stood and supported her head against this. Then she knocked so very gently with her finger tips that nobody could have heard. She stood again, five long minutes. The night was very silent. She knocked a second time, louder than before, with a spasmodic, uneven knock. There was a grunt from within; heavy footsteps approached the door. The door itself opened a few inches, letting out a bar of light that came from a lamp upon the wall. The man who had opened stood behind a second door of iron

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bars, between which he had thrust his hand to open the first.

"Who's there?" he called gruffly.

Sofia came and stood in the shaft of light, saying nothing. The man was startled at the eyes shining thus at him out of the night. He could see little else.

"Who is it?—what do you want?"

She tried to speak, but said nothing. The man suddenly recognized her.

"Oh," he said.

There were other footsteps and a second man, smaller than the first and with a sibilant voice, came to the door.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"It's his wife," said the first.

"Whose wife?—Oh," recognizing her also.

The woman was staring into the jail, the men were staring at the woman.

"What do you want?" said the man with the gruff voice at length.

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Her lips moved several times before she spoke.

"I want to see him," she said.

"Want to what?" bending down, having scarcely caught the low words.

"May I see him?"

"Oh—him. Why, it's too late. Nobody can get in at this time of night without a pass from the sheriff or the governor."

The sheriff—no, no—she could not go to the sheriff. She knew this confusedly. The smaller man, too, seemed suddenly to understand it.

"Sheriff's gone, anyhow; you'd have to go to the governor," he said.

She turned as though to go away. There came a boy's voice from lower down at her side.

"I'll go to the governor for the pass—let me go."

The boy's face, too, came out of the darkness. He stood with his hands on the bars.

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Sofia looked at him, seeming not to see him, and turned to the men again. The boy's face wore less the look of the idiot.

"Who in the devil are you?" said the larger man. "The governor doesn't know you—get away!"

The boy disappeared.

Still Sofia stood, looking into the night. Suddenly the larger man was moved.

"Oh, well," he said, "come in. Nobody'll know it. I'm not a beast, anyhow."

He unlocked the iron door and she came in. He closed the wooden one, and the bars again, and locked them. Turning, the two men stood a moment in the light of the lamp. She was gazing down the passage.

"Got nothing with you?" said the smaller man.

She looked at him without understanding. They made a hasty search of her dress, finding nothing.

The room was very small, a sort of vesti-

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bule to the passage. It had nothing at all in it save two chairs and a table, at which the men seemed to have been playing cards. The smaller man sat down. The other took keys from his pocket and led the way. Sofia following, they entered the passage and came to a right angle in it where the gloom was deep. Here other irons barred the way. The jailer opened this door also. Going through, she found herself walking between cells, which she scarcely noticed. Near the far end of this passage a second light burned dimly from the wall. At a point where seeing was possible, there stood a figure in one of the cells which she might have known had she looked.

Still following the jailer, she went beneath the light and beyond it. Coming to the cell they sought, the jailer paused and stood a little aside. She came and took hold of two of the bars of the door. This was near enough to the light so that she could

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see dimly the tall form seated on the cot's edge within. He was so still she might have thought him but a shadow or a stone figure—yet she knew him; she would have known him had it been much darker. He sat with his head between his hands, looking down. Trembling from head to foot, she tried to speak, but could not. She grasped the bars more tightly in her hands and pressed against them, struggling with the breath that would not come to form the words. She sank to her knees, able only to cry:

“Let me in—let me in!”

It was against his orders, but he unlocked the door and let her in. On the instant she had fallen beside the cot, clasping her husband with her arms. The jailer locked the door and walked some steps away. For a time there was silence in the cell. Patricio spoke first, in whispers.

“Am I going to hell, Sofia?”

“Oh no! no! no! It can't be! There is

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something wrong in it all, Patricio; you didn't mean it—it got away from us—we couldn't help it. Surely it won't be that!"

"But I think it will, girl—it's always been said so."

"But you didn't believe it all!"

"Not all—not the baby. But it's different with me. I killed him, you know—and the others."

"Not the others—and you didn't know it then about him. You weren't right, then, and the rest was like fever, too." She was speaking brokenly, clinging to him.

"Sofia," he said after a time, "what do you think hell is like?"

"Oh, I don't know—don't talk so!"

"Do you think it is eternal, Sofia?"

"I don't know! Don't, Patricio, don't."

"They always said it was forever. It's all so indefinite, somehow. It looks wrong that nobody ever knew any more, or tried to make a man understand it. You don't believe

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it,—about the fire, and all that, do you, Sofia?”

“No.”

“I could bear that—I could bear anything. Sofia—” sinking his voice lower, “—a man could be stronger than hell, I believe. A man could dare it, even if it was forever.”

“Think about something else, Patricio—think of me now—try to think just of me! And you won’t have to bear anything alone. I’m always with you—always to the end. If it is punishment for you, it is punishment for me—and if it’s eternal for you it’s eternal for me. I will not have it otherwise! But I can’t believe it. Somehow the punishment has to come out of us; I don’t know how to think it out—but I can’t believe it just begins somewhere else; and how could a man make anything eternal? It isn’t, Patricio!”

“Maybe it isn’t. But I don’t want you to bear it too.”

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"I will not have it any other way. I'm part of you; I've thought all your thoughts and had my heart burn just like yours, and been wicked the same. Thank God I've been the same!"

"Well—together then."

There was silence again.

"Sofia, I can remember so plainly what the baby looked like."

She shook with sobs.

"May be it'll do you good to cry," he continued. "Anyhow it's better to be thinking about him; it's good somehow. It seems the only right thing there is to think about. The rest is all wrong."

"Only I want him so, Patricio. Oh! everything is gone."

"I remember him so well, and how he was beginning to smile that way when you rubbed his cheek."

"Don't, Patricio!"

"I *have* to—*Dios!* I *have* to, Sofia! It's

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my only hope. I'll go mad if I let myself think of anything else!"

"Then it's all right—I'll think of him too. I can see him smile, too."

"And even when he lay there, it was there. Somehow it must mean something we don't know. What do you think it means?"

"I didn't understand it—only as the mountains look sometimes, in the evening, or maybe it was the sun on them. I didn't know; only when he smiled that way after he was dead, it was like being free away off somewhere. Maybe it'll mean something even for us. There must be something about dying we don't know, Patricio."

The jailer came to the door.

"You'd better come now."

He moved away again.

"It does me good to have you cry," Patricio said. "Come now, you must go. Kiss

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me and remember, we can bear it together—even if it's the very worst."

"Even if it's always."

She went out and the jailer locked the door and walked before her. They came under the light and toward the bars again. At the door of a cell she passed, Mathilde whispered to her:

"Sofia, you're thinking about the punishment again."

"No—we won't any more, Mathilde."

"Don't. It isn't worth the while. Nobody knows anything like that, girl. Just take it as it comes." She put her face against the irons close to the other's. Her voice bore the same calmness as always. "There is a happier thing in it all somewhere. We all missed it—but I know it is there. Lean closer, Sofia. It was he who showed me—the priest—Durant."

Something brought the knowledge of her love suddenly to Sofia.

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"You know, don't you, Sofia?"

"Yes, yes! You love him!"

"I wasn't worth it—but I do."

"There is something else, then, even for us?"

"Even for us."

The jailer had walked on, leading the way, only now discovering that she was not following. Returning, he led her out to the little room again, where the smaller man still sat under the light.

The latter arose and gave the other a written order.

"Just came," he said.

"Hm," replied the jailer, reading. "Why it's half past eleven now."

He looked at the woman, who was waiting. He unlocked and opened the doors and let her out.

The night again, silent and starlit, and the darkness of the alley. She groped her way, coming to the crooked street and the

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smoky light of the one oil lamp. With no thought or knowledge of her path she turned one way and walked a little distance. Behind her she heard the rattle of a vehicle coming to the jail. She paused and saw it turn into the alley. Hesitating, she came back and stood against the wall. Waiting some minutes, she heard a voice at her side.

"Señora!" said the boy, pulling at her dress.

The smoky light fell too dimly on him to enable her to see him plainly. There was the rattle of the wheels again in the alley and she noticed him no more. The vehicle, a heavy covered carriage, came out and turned into the street. It stopped directly by her, so that she backed into an angle of the wall. The driver descended and opened the door, speaking to some one within.

"The other road's the best, and it's deserted by this time. It's idiocy to go the

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roundabout way. I'm going straight for the prairie."

"Well, anything—but make haste!" came from a guard within.

The open door had swung within a foot of Sofia as she stood in the shadow. She could not have told how she knew, but that those she had just left were in the carriage she was suddenly aware. She saw the door close, the driver ascend his seat, the carriage move away. As fast as she could she followed it, running. But it was going farther from her; had turned a corner out of sight. She could have fallen upon the street and given up the struggle and died in the anguish. The boy was scudding away in front of her, following the carriage, disappearing.

The jail was near the prairie. But a few blocks away and reached by means of no chief thoroughfare, was the open plain, the mountains on one side of it, the penitentiary

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out in the midst of the nothingness on the other.

The streets were devoid of signs of life, and nearly all the houses were dark. The woman turned the corner where she had seen the carriage turn, and followed blindly, running now no more. Coming to the last of the houses, she stared into the limitless expanse of starlit plain. She was not sure whether or not she saw the black spot of the carriage. To the ruins of some old adobe fence-work at the last house, she clung and looked, seeing, hearing, nothing. Out of the darkness came the boy, returning. He nearly ran against her, then, seeing her, stopped.

"Señora!" he said, no sign of the idiot in his voice.

"Who are you?" she cried.

"'Sus."

The old bewilderment came over her and she did not understand.

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"'Sus," he repeated, "Juan's boy."

"Oh," a little comprehending; "Juan's boy."

"*Si*—you know; across the mountains, where they were going. I came on purpose."

"Yes," with no interest. "I understand."

"I came from Antonio," continued 'Sus.

She turned quickly, then relaxed into hopelessness.

"Antonio is dead," she said.

"No, no! Señora, Antonio is not dead. Antonio is more alive than ever."

"Tell me!" she cried.

"He and the priest escaped and came to us with the girl."

"You wouldn't lie to me, would you, 'Sus?"

"It is true as God. I came to find out everything for him. I played the lunatic here. I watched it all, Señora. I am to go back to-night and report it all to him. Maybe he can help you away."

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"I don't want away, boy—I don't want away. Tell him to go on. I'm glad he's safe. It doesn't make any difference about me any more, 'Sus."

"Antonio does his own thinking," said the boy.

"Where did the carriage go, 'Sus?"

"Don't bother about that," said the boy. "They are going right out there to the penitentiary."

"But they were—they were to die, 'Sus."

"The governor is afraid. They can die out there; I've looked for this all along. 'Sus is not any fool if he did play it. These people are likely to knock the jail down any time—get mad, you know."

Sofia rested herself on the ruins of the adobe fence, sinking nearly to the ground.

"They'll keep them out there, will they, 'Sus?"

"And nobody'll know it."

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"Afraid of the people. Well—I'm not afraid of anything any more."

"Come—let me go back with you. I must be gone before it is light. I'll tell Antonio to come for you."

"No. Go on—let me rest a little here. I don't want to go now. I can stay here. I'd rather."

The boy stood in silence as she lay with her arms upon the adobe fence.

"You'll go back pretty soon, if I go?"

"Yes."

"What shall I tell Antonio?"

"I don't know," listlessly.

"I'll tell him to come."

"No—tell him I'm safe and all right. They let me go free, you know. Tell him to get away as safely as he can, and never come back. I—I'm all right now, 'Sus. Tell him I'm all right, for you know they let me go free."

He went running away and disappeared.

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She lay there nearly all that night, her heart seeming dead to her, yet starting now and then in fresh moments of anguish or loneliness. The stars blinked still on the desert sands, and still she lay, staring over the barren flat. When the first streaks of dawn came into the east, she arose and went into the narrow street. Yes—she was all right now; they had set her free.

## CHAPTER XXII

THE afternoon sun rested on Chiquito's hut and its rugged surroundings. The brown Mexican woman was laboriously grinding corn on a *metate* to the rear. To the front, beside a loose fence of stones surrounding a plot of growing grain, Chiquito himself sat talking to Antonio. Two horses, lean, wiry, hung their heads close by.

On a rock at a little distance, motionless, basking in the sun, was Ramoncita. To-day she seemed a woman. She was a trifle pale, her face wearing the marks of her illness, and rapid convalescence. The hardihood of some masterful race, the strength of the mountain-hunting savage, had worked in her. No flesh wound might exhaust her. She had clung to life with indomitable tenacity, had rebounded from her condition of

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weakness. She sat in silence, and remembered; shadows in her eyes, faint lines of sorrow on her face.

Juan was a small man of broad frame and straggling beard. His speech was composed of bad English.

"It's a heap o' trouble to keep him in bed," said he. He was leaning with his back against the stones of the fence, his knees drawn up to his chest. Antonio's shadow was cast across his face.

"You must keep him in bed," said Antonio.

"It's a man o' no consequence," continued the other, eying Antonio. "Ole woman says how he got up towards yesterday mornin' an' was breakin' somethin' or other. Ole woman says it's rotten."

Antonio took little or no interest in this. He was restless, looking away down the trail. He turned and gazed at Ramoncita, sitting

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yonder on the rock. And as he gazed, she stirred and sighed.

"A man sees what's wrong, er what he figgers out is wrong. Er a man sees what he wants, er what he figgers out he wants. He gits his gun. He goes out straight and the trouble is there lyin' around loose. He takes his gun an' he hunts that there trouble. He gits mixed in it, rows around. Well, he makes it right, er so's he figgers it out it's right; er he gits what he wants, er figgers it out he gits it, er figgers it out he don't want it, one o' the three. Them's one way," laying it off with one hand. "Other way's this: If the trouble's too eternally *damn* loose, why, he *don't* make it right; it's wrong yet, an' he don't figger it out no way. An' he don't git what he wants. This here way," laying it off with the other hand, "gits him into the rocks. His gun ain't no go. Nerve ain't no go. Gits winded, run down. Well, what's this? It's to die sayin' nothin', that's

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what it is. Cuss a man what says anything when it's went wrong with him. Cuss a fever. A man what don't die ca'm without no trimmin's o' any kind, is a man o' no consequence."

The matter appealed little to Antonio.

"You're reasoning wrong," he said.

"She says the thing what *he* says, ain't no man—it's a woman."

Antonio moved a little restlessly. The girl, yonder in the sun, raised her arms and cast back her head so that it rested in her hands, the hair hanging down, the eyes gazing away at the mountainous ascent.

"Cuss a woman, says I. Well, she says he sees her goin' off somewheres and is fer goin' too. Them's the way it is. You recollect how it was, and know how his mind is. He's fightin' it all out constant. Well, I says it's a pore thing to do; I says it don't make nothin' ner fix nothin' ner kill nothin'. And if a man don't make nothin', ner fix

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nothin', ner kill nothin', why, gosh, he don't *do* nothin'. A man what dies slower on account of a woman than he would 'a' died without the woman, is delayin' on no grounds."

"What does he say?" asked Antonio.

"He puts it in sich queer talk that it's hard to do it over. I've been a-layin' to go at it with you. 'Cause he made it so bindin' on me. It was when I goes in of a night, three nights back o' last night, and the light was on the point o' goin' out. He sits up. I was fer fixin' him down ag'in. He gives me eyes what I don't like—make anybody know he was a man o' no consequence lookin' at you like that. I stops. He begins like it was wrote down, and hot it was. I sees he thinks I was you, 'cause he says so. There wasn't no question about that, fer he says so. Well, it was a heap fer you to tell them that's in jail. He wasn't right when he said it, fer his face was red, you know. I

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wouldn't 'a' tried to recollect—fact, don't recollect more'n half—fer it's o' no consequence. Only I kept seein' him all along ever since, and how it was when he said it. Well, says I, I better say it to Borrego. He can do the fergittin' of it as well as me. What he says is this: 'It's the goin' back o' the soul.' Them's his words. I says fer him not to think about them, which he didn't say nothin'. He says that several times. The rest I don't recollect 'cept that it was like this. A feller goes along straight always, both before he gits born and after he dies. Plumb crazy, you see, and I knowed quick as he says it, it was no go. But I *can* figger it out like he meant it—as plain as he figgers it out. A man goes along like that, says he, and if he falls down it aint his fault. I says it's a lie. Then, if he does fall down, why, he jist loses so much o' the goin' on—what he might 'a' had, you know. He says it ain't no burnin' him ner any sich

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—it's jist losin' that much, that's all. And, says he, the chance fer to git up ag'in aint never gone. I says it was damn handy. It was then he leans closer over to me an' outs with it a many a time the same, that the chance fer to git up aint never gone. I says ag'in, it was damn handy."

Ramoncita was leaning farther back, reclining in an angle of the rock. Her figure, extended, was full of that exquisite grace which ever characterized her. In the midst of a sad reverie, a faint stray smile was seen for an instant on her lips. Antonio was pacing to and fro nervously. His eyes were more constantly on the girl.

"He says, thinkin' I was you, 'Will I tell 'em?' He says it so I knowed he'd do somethin' new if I didn't. I says I would, my stars. Well, I've give it to you. You can do the fergittin' of it. It hung in my mind like it was tar—but I knowed it was o' no consequence."

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"'Sus is coming," said Antonio, stopping in his course.

The girl had turned and was looking down the ascent. She arose slowly. She came on down to another rock near which Antonio stood. They looked at each other, saying nothing. She sat down, pale, her lips apart.

The boy, astride the burro, appeared coming round a bend in the trail some distance below. The three waited. 'Sus, having ridden to the house, jumped off, kicked the burro into freedom, and met the men.

"Well, what is it?—quick with it!" said Antonio.

Ramoncita, not arising, was bent forward, her eyes like burning points.

"Patricio and the girl to die, Sofia and Jimpe free," said the boy briefly. He was slight and alert, the eyes black as coal and very bright. Yet a certain delicate cast of countenance, and a dreaminess which he was capable of infusing into his expression, made

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the idiot part he had played not unsuited to him.

"When will they die?"

"Two weeks from to-day."

"Where are they now?"

"In the penitentiary."

"Why in heaven's name are they there?"

"Mobs—the governor is afraid. *Dios!* Señor—haven't you lived long enough to know?" The boy looked at him with some disgust. "Old man," he continued, seeming to see Juan for the first time, "Antonio will need the horses."

Borrego turned slowly and came to the girl. She was colorless. Pain knotted her brow. Pain, the same he had perceived when she suffered from the wound, but deeper, appealed to him in silence from eyes half closed. She trembled, and he rested a hand on her fingers as they lay upon the rock. He turned again to 'Sus.

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"Where is Sofia?" asked he.

*"Quien sabe?"*

"You imp, didn't you see her, didn't you follow her?"

"I saw her lying at the edge of the prairie in the middle of the night, looking out at the penitentiary, Señor. *Dios!* isn't it enough?"

Antonio was silent for a time, 'Sus watching him, Juan looking from one to the other, stroking his beard.

"What kept you so long?" said Antonio at last.

"The trial. It didn't happen till five days ago. How should I know anything at all, Señor, if I hadn't waited till the trial?"

"Do they know I'm alive?"

"Well, some are beginning to think about it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"When the bodies that were claimed were brought out of the pass, the government sent

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to bury the rest of you in the prairie at the end of the cliff. Mexicans did it—low down Mexicans too. They piled them in any way. There is an old man of them telling it everywhere now, that the priest wasn't among them—nor you nor the girl, Señor."

Antonio's lips straightened across his teeth.

"Well?" he said.

"Well, there is talk of hunting for you. Some there are who are still wild like coyotes. They say you and the priest and the girl got away and are coming back with a mob to get the others out. The governor thinks they may want to kill the others before you can come. That is what the penitentiary is for."

Antonio was silent again, looking down the trail.

"Where shall I find Sofia?" he asked shortly.

"Maybe at home—but I say somewhere out

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in the middle of the night—out in the desert, I say.”

Ramoncita arose. She pushed the hair from her forehead.

“We will go back,” she said, her eyes on Antonio.

He turned quickly to her.

“Not you—Ramoncita—not you! I shall go alone. You will wait for us here.”

Her eyes fell. She went restlessly toward the hut. She paused and stirred the small stones of the path with her foot. She turned and started back to him; and turned again to the hut. Reaching it, she sank down in the doorway, leaning forward with her face in her arms. The muscles of Antonio’s jaws stood out. He turned to Juan.

“I must go at once. If I could get the horses over the way I came, it would save two days.”

“But you can’t,” growled Chiquito. “You have to go this way and all around, and it’ll

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take you four days anyhow. You'll git your fool self killed when you git there."

"May I have the horses?"

"You'll git yourself killed, I says."

"If I get killed, it's myself. You said you would help us over the line."

"And I will, too, anything sensible; and the road's cut clear and little danger from here; Pedro next, Malazo next, then Juan Aberno, then ole Dave—and you're over the line. But how long are you goin' to fool around like this?"

"Till I have something to go for, Chiquito. You give me your help—Santa Maria! what do I want with it? Can't I go alone? What good is it to me? May I have the horses?"

"Take 'em," with an abandoning movement of the hands. "And you'd better make haste." The prospector turned and joined the woman at the rear.

Antonio approached the hut.

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"Señor!" said the boy, coming close to him.

"What?"

"How is he in there?"

Antonio strode on.

"He'll die," he said presently.

The boy wheeled about and went to his burro.

On the rough-hewn doorstep still sat Ramoncita, alone, her head on her arms. Antonio came and stood over her, and saw that she wept, silently.

"Ramoncita," said he.

She looked up, banishing her tears, an appeal in her very expression.

"You must stay," said he. "I shall come back with Sofia if I can."

"Antonio," she began, "I too want to go. I can't stay. Father Durant does not need me. I—I might see her, Antonio."

"Impossible! God!—girl, will you kill me!"

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"Antonio, I was a part of the crime. I must go back and do what I can with you, to get Sofia away. I know her better than you do. You could never persuade her." She arose. Her old passionate manner returned and she seized his hand and looked up in his face. "Antonio—don't, don't leave me!"

He was strongly moved.

"You can not bear it," he said.

"I can bear anything! And here—waiting here—I shall die!"

She brought her face closer, earnestly.

"Please, please, Antonio!"

"Ramoncita," he cried, "if I believed you loved me; if I believed that you go because now, forever, you cast your lot with mine, risk everything with me, can not leave me, but follow me because you are mine—come! —we shall never separate again."

A deep tremor was in his voice. He had

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pressed closer to her. Her hand was held by his; his gaze, bent down upon her face, seemed to pierce her heart.

She looked for an instant frightened. A little banner of red came and waved on her cheek, and disappeared. She trembled and all but fell. He caught her, and she sank down again upon the step.

"Mathilde!" she sobbed.

He moved a little away, a heavy frown on his forehead, yearning still in his eyes.

"I understand," he began at last. "I shall respect your sorrow, for it is mine. Ramoncita, I know you now, to your soul's depth; for, if there is life in the world, that too is mine. You could not stay here—any more than I could stay. You are the heart of flame, as before; and now—being a woman—you are something else. I will take you. I will try to care for you. Together we will try to see her. But I have no hope—for, do

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not forget, we are criminals and accursed. We will get Sofia away. Little girl, I will now press you no more; but you are going to let me believe that you go because you can not leave me; as I," he came closer, "am going to take you—Ramoncita!—because I can not leave you—because I shall never leave you. And your going is the pledge."

Her face was buried as she sat. She was absolutely still. He moved past her, entering the door. "In half an hour, or less," he said, his eyes on her. He disappeared within.

Still, for a long time, she did not move, the yellow sunlight flooding her. She was the criminal and accursed—but she did not sorrow for it. Before the half hour had passed, she arose and prepared; and there had come a little color back in her face. When she stepped from the hut, ready, she wore a wide straw sombrero, under which her face looked like tinted ivory; her eyes

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were sad and deep; her step was strong, elastic, like the step of the old, child-like Ramoncita. But she was indeed a woman.

He helped her to her horse's back, and they rode away.

They were barely out of sight when Durant stood suddenly and unsteadily in the door. He was delirious. He clung to the door's frame. In the delirium's intervals, Antonio had made him understand some of 'Sus's news.

"Has he gone?" cried Durant thickly, as the Indian doctor seized him and tried to lead him back.

"He's gone. Come in," mumbled the medicine man.

But the priest struggled, staring with lurid eyes along the lower trail.

"Get me a horse!" he broke out suddenly, in a reckless and unsound imperativeness. He turned dizzily, moved with an unnatural erectness to his bed, and sank upon it. Chi-

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quito appeared in the door, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

"Gosh," he said to himself, "there aint another horse in twenty miles."

## CHAPTER XXIII

**U**PON a certain night in early autumn the penitentiary lay in silence under the stars. At half past eleven, the moon, being young, went down under the edge of the west. Some tinge of its yellow hung yet mistily over the western horizon. The night was still, as only a breezeless prairie night can be. No breath out of the mountains lifted any smallest grain of the expanse of sand. The walled square of the prison was alone in the plain; barrenness to the left for endless miles until the horizon shut it away; barrenness to the front for endless miles again until the descent in the desert showed the lower stars; barrenness to the rear, a waste of sand up to the mountain line; barrenness yet to the right across a level stretch over whose

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flat expanse shone the distant lights of the city.

A square of the dimensions of one hundred yards each way, blocked out in the desert's middle, was surrounded by massive walls of brick, over the top of which the roofs of the inner buildings appeared but dimly in the night. At that time the present modern safeguards were in the main lacking. There were no towers about the prison walls such as at present contain the ever-ready guards with loaded rifles. No tower stood, as now it stands, before the one opening through the solid bricks to the front. There were guards, indeed, but they were concentrated within, and at night chiefly about the cells. The principle then employed was the nipping at its immediate source of any attempt at escape. The walls without and the heavy irons at the entrance were deemed sufficient to take care of themselves.

Shortly after nightfall there had come a

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wagon, loaded with timbers, to the gate. It had been halted, unloaded, and driven away, in much secrecy and attempts at silence. Later there had been for the space of an hour, a hammering, as muffled as a hammering could be, within the hollow square. Now for long there was no sound.

After the setting of the moon, it being now near midnight, there came stealthily from the city two shadows deeper than the shadows of the night. Coming slowly nearer, they became horses close together. Coming still nearer, cautiously rounding at last the corner of the great wall, the shadows stopped beneath the wall's own shadow. One of the horses bore a man, the other a woman.

Having reached the city at dusk and in safety, they had hidden themselves. A secret search for Sofia had been instituted. She was not at her home. A very few of the most wary of Antonio's advisers kept the two seekers in safety. The search seeming

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ineffectual, Borrego recalled the statements of 'Sus. She might be at the penitentiary. He learned of the pitiable irregularity of her life, that she was seldom at home, that she wandered like a shade in darkness, that she was rarely seen to take food, that her form had wasted away during these long days of misery until she had become scarcely recognizable, that death itself seemed imminent, ever threatening that pale wreck who would not avoid it. A messenger was sent to the penitentiary. He returned with the news that he had seen her.

So the two had come, together. They sat for a time waiting, seeing nothing. They had not in the faintest degree disturbed the silence of the night.

There came round the corner of the wall, a hundred yards away, another shadow. Seeing it, Borrego looked steadily out from under the brim of his sombrero and waited still. The other shadow, small and low, crept along

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under the wall toward the gate at the entrance. There it crouched on the ground.

It moved no more. Antonio dismounted, helped the girl also to alight, and hung the reins over the horses' heads to the ground. They came then cautiously together along the wall to the gate. The other shadow was yet crouched at the bars.

She had not seen them, nor indeed anything at all, save the blackness within. Nor had she heard their steps upon the sand. She was staring between the irons, her face against them.

"Sofia," he said.

She shrank instantly away from the gate to the wall beyond, crouching yet lower still, seeming terrified.

Ramoncita stepped nearer her. The girl was shaking. Her voice was unsteady and low; she put out a timid hand and touched the woman's arm.

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"Sofia," she said sadly, "don't you know me?"

Somehow Sofia had grown accustomed to thinking them dead. She had scarcely remembered what the boy had told her—expected not at all that Antonio would come. She did not seem to realize the presence of Ramoncita; her attention was fastened on Borrego. He was like one from the grave suddenly risen beside her, speaking to her out of the night. Yes, she knew him, but the brain did not comprehend it. She could not speak.

"It is Antonio, Sofia," said the girl.

The woman came a step nearer, feeling yet more clearly that it was indeed he in the flesh. Then suddenly what the boy had said returned to her. She clasped his arms and clung to him. He would rather have remained silent, merely taken her away, saying nothing; but he feared that she would not go.

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"Why are you here, Sofia—why are you here now?" he asked.

She looked up at him in some wonder.

"Don't you know? *He's* in there!" she whispered, as though that were all of it. She loosened her hold on him and leaned against the iron again, looking in. He feared she was losing her mind.

"You have come every night, Sofia?"

"Every night."

"Who has cared for you?"

She did not reply. She was looking in.

"Who has cared for you all these days?" he asked.

"The women—and I didn't need anything, Antonio—I haven't needed anything."

He pondered on the method of getting her away. She was stooping down beside him. He thought:—Has she been thus every night, every night and all the night, through it all?

"What time do you go away?" he asked.





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"What time? Oh—. When it's gray over there."

"Sofia, he would prefer that you stay away."

She had not thought of that; she would not think of it now.

"I don't know," she said, looking always into the prison.

"I've come to take you away, Sofia," he said at last.

She did not hear. Even in the darkness her fearful weakness was evident. At times she seemed tottering. Had the light been sufficient they would have understood that death must claim her. The very principle of her existence was even now in its last hours. The life of her husband was her all. For many days she had unconsciously wrecked herself. Her mind, veiled and staggering, had been incapable of caring for her body.

A great wave of grief and pity broke in the

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heart of Ramoncita. Convulsed, she sprang to the woman, clasped her in passion round her body, and cried :

"Sofia !—don't you know me? Don't you know me? It's Ramoncita, little Ramoncita, whom you used to love !"

Sofia partially understood, but with vague interest.

"Ramoncita," murmured she.

The girl broke down in tears.

"I came to save you," cried she imploringly, "to take you away with me. I know !—I understand !—I shall never leave you !"

Slowly freeing herself from the girl's arm, Sofia turned again to the gate. There were a few moments of silence; Ramoncita leaning in despair against the wall.

"Antonio," said Sofia at last.

"What is it? You will come?"

"I ought to be in there."

She was thinking none of his thoughts;

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she was in the grief-blackened world of her own.

"I ought to be inside," she continued. "I haven't any right out here. I belong there, the same as he."

"Listen, Sofia; Patricio is strong. He knows you are safe. He is willing to bear his part. If there is anything he wants it is for you to come away with me, across the mountains—where you shall be free."

She was silent a long time, leaning against the gate, looking in.

"I don't need it, Antonio; I don't need any thing."

Thinking it over, he tried another method.

"If you do not come, Sofia, we also shall be taken and killed," he said.

"You weren't afraid of it before," she replied. "My place is here. Go away—save yourself—forget me."

There was nothing else to say. He thought of Durant and his message. He

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told it to her as clearly as he could. She listened to it, hearing every word, yet looking always into the prison.

"I'm glad," she said, when he had finished.

She was suddenly pressed closer to the bars, clasping them with her arms through, her elbows bent about them and her fingers clutching them at her face. Startled, he heard steps within, the sound coming from a distance near one of the inner buildings. Looking in, he thought he caught the faintest gleam of a lantern's light on a bayonet. The steps were more numerous now, the sound coming faintly through the night, as the feet of those who moved crushed the sand. Near the gate within there were irregular piles of stone where the convicts worked by day; across these an open court-like space surrounded the buildings two hundred feet away.

He heard the march out from the chief

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building of cells, over the sand in the darkness. The steps, as of a dozen persons, went away across the open court, into the distance and the shadows. They smote his ears and made a coldness in his limbs. He moved to her side against the bars and clasped her about with his arms and held her. She was as though not living—only for the grasping of the irons and the straining of the body close against them.

For five endless minutes thus they waited. Ramoncita had turned dizzily to the horses, her brain on fire. The pitying darkness of the night prevented seeing. Sofia's hands relaxed at last and she fell unconscious. Antonio raised her in his arms and staggered with her away along the wall, under the shadow of its desolate protection, to the spot where the animals stood.

He found Ramoncita leaning stunned against her saddle. He touched her.

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"Come; we must be strong together," he whispered.

Mechanically she made that old motion of flinging grief away. She turned, but stiffly, the fire gone from her brain, her senses frozen. But she was strong.

Together they got the woman on a horse's back. She fell forward. Ramoncita, mounting the other animal, rode close, holding her. At the opposite side strode Antonio, his arm supporting her unconscious form.

It was thus the mournful and secret party came to Santa Fé in stealth. For Ramoncita the journey required an almost superhuman effort. She herself had been all but crushed. Her old tremendous power of will forced down her own anguish, bent her energies on Sofia. Her face in the darkness was set and stern, strong with a somber strength. And near her, over the starlit plain in silence, walked Antonio.

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They crept into the town in the earliest hours of the morning. The streets were as dead as tombs. They lifted Sofia from her horse and brought her to her own home, and laid her on her own bed. Two friends only were found to help them. A light was brought and held over the woman. Those about the bed shrank back, amazed at her emaciation. Wonderful was the power that had preserved her spirit thus long, in a body so death-like. That power was now gone, released yonder in the prison.

She was dead. Her place had been with her husband; her duty, to follow him. She had thought his thoughts; his life had been her life. Whether in a region of peace, or torment, or forgiveness, her soul was with his.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**T**HERE was one lost in the mountains.

The sun here comes up suddenly. It had been promised on certain cliffs in certain heights, an hour before. It was here now. The seams of many rocks were yellow with it over the native brown. The floor of the narrow ascent was strewn with stones, jaggedly. The sun, looking among heaps of natural ruins, found grasses, even flowers. Otherwhere there were pines. The morning wind in them discovered chords of its own, played them for nobody's ears, merely because they were there. Over the turf-like expanse visible between the ruins from the ascent,—a green expanse which was really no such carpet as it seemed, but lower mountains, *mesas*, hills—over this stared the

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sun himself. He was yonder across the desert. The desert had lain under him thus so often that it only slept. He must burn more hotly still, he must be less silent, would he wake the desert. He hung in the east, a little red. He hung thus in the east, looked over the desert, spread his light on these stones strewn jaggedly, a score of thousand years before the flowers in the garden opened up to Buddha.

There was one walking dizzily over the stones, climbing the ascent.

Some miles up, the ascent issued in a broad grove of the pines, with peaks all about. Under the pines lay clean floors of brown needles. From each tree, once in a quarter of an hour perhaps, dropped another needle so small that even a magpie could not have noticed it. The sunlight (it was the afternoon sun now), coming in yellow and lying dreamily over the brown floor, was spotted with many shadows that flitted

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about, making quick gray streaks across the grove.

There was one with the blood burning hot in his veins, lying on the mat of needles beside a rock.

There were dreams, too, in the mountains. There was a dream in the moonlight—the encircling socket of the cliffs, where was the mountain eye. A hundred spirits rose from the lake below; the breath of the mountains was their breath. The hundred trooped around the socket's circle. The moon was gone—they trooped still. The water disappeared, there was only blackness. The socket was eyeless, burned out. The spirits raced in panic, seeking a shelter from the fever that had burned the waters out.

There was one at the circle's edge, mad with the fever.

The dream became another dream—the shadow of a woman. There was a poise of

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the head, a stillness of the eye. There was a call for help, and the shadow going away.

That other long descent into the desert lay dark in the night. The shadow floated down its length, drawing him, so that he followed, and staggered and fell. The shadow called, and he was going on. There was a place, half way down, where the walls stood close together, and there had been stones built across to bar the passage.

Miles below this the eastern desert began. A wind came out of the cañon and stirred the sand. Yet the desert knew it not at all. Like the other expanse in the day, so this one in the night, slept—the great, endless, silent slumber of a desert. Had one been lifted very high up, he might have seen the few last lights of the city. Here one saw nothing, only the gloom burying the sight. Her shadow, alone, was there. The last dream, and yet the first and the second, and

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indeed all the dream, was the dream of failure.

He came thus far. In the last hours he had somehow grown strangely cold. The confusion that had been the journey had changed to a dead silence. The air seemed congealed about him, there was no life nor motion anywhere upon the earth.

## CHAPTER XXV

**I**N the early morning the light of the yet unrisen sun came into the city's streets and found them bare. There was no wind. The gray dawn showed silent adobe walls that stood in a kind of earthen slumber, here and there a glazed eye, bleared, staring across into another glazed eye. It was only a somnambulistic stare or the stare of old age and sickness; for neither eye was awake or saw.

He came into a street from the western prairie, a traveler on foot with the prairie's dust upon him. He walked between the two opposite rows of walls without seeing. His footfalls echoed a little in hollow fashion along the empty thoroughfare. His gait was neither rapid nor slow; it was mechanical. He was like one wrapped in an unbreakable meditation, who goes on unconscious, inspir-

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ited with a tragedy of his own, so that his step acquires a certain uncanny sedateness. He looked only at the ground some ten yards before him, his eyes being the eyes of a dreamer. Twice, suddenly and without warning, out of the set precision of his course he staggered. The second time he leaned against a door, a door which was crooked at the top and set in an ancient wall. For a quarter of an hour, without sound or motion, he stood almost erect. That same door had held, some days previous, parts of a curious crowd, and out of it had walked, here where now there were the dawn and he alone, criminals.

Having stared that quarter of an hour at the stones, he awoke to himself with a start and proceeded on his way. He reached the end of the street, passing no one. The city seemed dead. He turned into a second street, not breaking the setness of his reverie. With a measured tread he came to that old

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Spanish chapel. The gray light was on its ugly tower.

Without looking at it he walked up the steps of the embankment and through a gate of the picket fence. He carried one arm, unbound but stiff, across his breast.

He stood for a moment, as though dazed, at the church's door. It was unlocked and he pushed it open. There were the outlines, barely visible, of the few benches, the altar, the Virgin. He had entered that door a hundred times. He had stood and knelt before the altar. He went through the church, still wrapped in that measured reverie, and out of a door behind the altar, once again suddenly staggering. He crossed a small, unroofed passage wherein was the dawn's gray. He entered the rooms he had used for his own.

Going to a small cupboard he took a candle and lit it, and set it on a table beneath a mirror. He turned stiffly and looked about

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the room. It was the room of a priest. There was no smile nor frown nor bitterness on his face, only a repose worse than the worst of all these, and whiteness.

With much precision and infinite care, yet never slowly, he washed the earth from his face and hands. He took the light and held it to the mirror, leaned with his face close to it, and looked in. He set the candle down, and securing his long black cassock, put it on, so that it fell to his feet. Being the priest, he turned all about and looked again at the room. He may have seen every article in it with magnified distinctness, or he may have seen them not at all. Leaving the candle burning, he went to the door and out.

It was lighter, though the sun was not yet up. In the east the red of it came slowly over the horizon. There were a few people here and there, laborers. He saw neither the sun's red nor the laborers. With the same uncanny sedateness of tread he walked

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away. He was the priest again, and now and then the fact of his presence there struck some early passer-by as monstrous. Before he reached the edge of the town there were some following him. It could be only a question of minutes until he should be taken. Walking on unconscious, never turning, only now and then staggering as before, he came to the prairie with the penitentiary lying in its middle.

There was no change in his face or his gait when he saw the distant walls. Did they not let priests enter the penitentiary? Had he himself not entered it at times before, when criminals were suffering or dying or dead? He was not only arrayed in his priestly vestments; was he not surrounded now for the last time with the remnants of that sanctity, that spiritual power, which he had violated and trampled under foot? All reason had died with the fever in that deadly march

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across the desert. Aye, a priest could enter the penitentiary.

A man, excited and running, passed him, coming from the prison, and entered the town. He stared blankly at Durant as he passed, and those behind Durant stopped him and gibbered. The priest was half way to the prison walls, and there began to overtake and go beyond him, toward the prison also, excited men and women. They gaped at him and ran on, and returned, and ran on again. Some were for seizing him. He did not hear nor see. He kept his measured pace unconscious. His manner awed them, so that they let him alone.

He came to the corner of the penitentiary. The sun, at this, blazed suddenly forth above the eastern line and poured its yellow flood broadcast over the prairie's brown. The plain was still and wide, and in all the endless expanse of that new morning there was no break save the walls.

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There was a crowd of ragged men and women at the gate. A stream of other men and women came on out of the town. They huddled about the entrance. The priest walked among them unseeing, straight to the bars. They fell away in front of him, inspired by his face. As they did so some officers rode to the gate, dismounted from their horses, and, guarding the entrance carefully, unlocked it and went in.

They would have closed the gate at once, but Durant was half way through. It chanced that they did not recognize him, though a priest at all, here and now, was strange enough. They put their hands on his shoulders and tried to thrust him back.

"Stand aside!" cried he with the voice of a tyrant. "Let the priest of God enter!"

He seemed a giant. His eyes upon them filled them with such terror that they slunk back and let him pass. When he had gone in and they had shut the gate upon the rab-

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ble, they began to whisper among themselves that he was mad. Repenting, they came after him. He was walking away across the inner space toward the buildings, wavering strangely, yet always with his measured tread. The sunshine lay high on the upper stories and roofs. The lower stories, the ground, the priest with his flowing cassock and his one stiff arm across his breast, were in the wall's shadow.

Behind the main building, which was locked, was a smaller one of stone. The officers reached him as he neared it. The door was open, giving view only into a corridor. Before it were four guards with guns. He came and stood close to them, between the four and those who followed. He fixed his eyes on them in silence and stared at them.

"Is she here?" he said.

They were unable to speak. They drew closer together and guarded the door. They

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stared back at him, filled with the awe one feels of the mad. He raised his voice, harsh and hard.

"Is she here?" he cried.

They suddenly understood who he was. They moved a little backward, still closer to the door. One of them involuntarily, or perhaps from design, cast his eyes in the direction of the farther prison wall. Durrant, otherwise motionless, looked also. There was, against that farther wall, with the sun just reaching its top, a scaffold, empty. Two workmen were beginning to take it down.

The face of the priest was livid. Haggard as death he turned his eyes once more to the door; then with that most terrible of all cries, the half-human, half-animal cry of a maniac, he sprang upon the guards. All that grief and pain and fever had left of his life, was centered in the spring. The muscles of his limbs were steel. With the

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fury of a demon he broke through them, hurled them aside, crushed them down. He was at the door itself and staggering in.

Reeling, they wheeled about. They dragged upon him. They lifted bayonets and stabbed him in the back. With no sound he sank to the stone of the threshold, swayed forward and fell upon his face. It was the weakness of the flesh, or the great Irony, or the dumbness of the things that are, that left him dead not twenty feet from where she lay.

## CHAPTER XXVI

ONE day and a part of another night Antonio and Ramoncita rested in hiding. They learned the last syllable of the tragedy. In the darkness preceding the next dawn, they fled.

High up in the mountains, where the new sun bathed the new life in light, they rode together. Grief sat on the face of each; yet in it was the promise of peace. He rode close to her, and at times held her. Tears upon her face were dried by a morning breeze, purer and blither than the very spirits of the mountain nymphs. The pines nodded in endearing welcome. The rocks, the earth, the sky, were brilliant with that rare beauty of unpolluted sunshine. Solitude bloomed with wasted loveliness. Even out of the blackest night had come forth this immeasurable, eternal flood of radiance.

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Tragedy lay behind, resignation was the meaning of the present. Before them was freedom, the hut, the way of escape, the regenerated hope. And love made life new.

At noon they halted at a high and shady spot. They dismounted and she came and stood beside him as he sat upon a rock.

"Ramoncita!" cried he, "you love me!"

A flush was on her face; a little smile, sad, came out upon her lips. She was beautiful as the morning; hallowed, like the light of day. She stepped a little nearer and held out her arms, tears glistening on her lashes.

"Antonio, I am a girl no more; I am a woman. My heart, too, has grown big, Antonio, big as all the world. And though once foolish and wayward, I think it is now very strong, and unchanging. And with all this heart, with all my soul, Antonio," she drooped fainting toward him, "I love you—forever—forever—I love you!"

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He caught her in his strong arms. Her face was raised and their lips met.

The hours of rest trod by gently, tip-toe; the pines sighed. He held her now, curled up against his breast, as he might have held a child. Her black hair fell and covered his hand. She too sighed, long and deeply, a sigh as of one who, lately lost and weary, has found a home. They scarcely spoke. After a time her eyes beheld, looking at her through the trees, the pale face of the moon, faint in the useless competition with the day. And, lying still in his arms, she sang a little, softly:

*"See, the white moon shines on high."*

THE END

